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# STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE RELIGION

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# THE RELIGION OF ANCIENT EGYPT

By REV. ALEXIS MALLON, S.J.

## I. GENERAL NOTIONS

1. *In Ancient Egypt there existed a Religion.*—Herodotus once wrote that the Egyptians were the most religious of men (II. 37). And in point of fact it was long ago noticed that all the monuments they have bequeathed to us are temples or tombs : temples for the cult of the gods, tombs for that of the dead. These two ideas, the Divine and the Other-world, seem to have dominated their whole life, and to have claimed their best energies. It was beneath their influence that the Egyptians undertook those giant labours, and built the pyramids and temples which have defied the centuries and form matter for the amazement of each succeeding generation. Of private dwellings, of the homes of princes and the palaces of kings, nothing, or next to nothing, remains ; they were but halting-stations for their inhabitants, or inns where one tarries for a day and passes on ; no more attention than what necessity demanded was given to their building. And of the papyri which have reached us, the vast majority, not to say absolutely all, deal with subjects immediately or remotely religious ; they enshrine the story of the gods, and hymns, and above all, information upon the after-life ; formulas, prayers for the use of the dead. There existed, therefore, a religion in Egypt. What were its distinguishing characteristics ? These can be reduced to two main points : it was a Religion of *Nature*, and it was *Composite*.

2. *General Characteristics of the Egyptian Religion.*—First and foremost, then, it was a religion of Nature, and

primarily of the Sun : not indeed that the Egyptians adored sun or moon, heaven or earth, or their great river Nile ; but if we set aside its abstract notions, all that their religion contained of symbols, of emblems, of figures and images, was borrowed from the visible Egyptian world. Hence, there exists a supreme God, a Creator : but this god approximates so closely to the sun that in certain hymns it is often impossible to distinguish whether it is the material sun or the God who is being worshipped. The sun, ever radiant, ever victorious, rising and setting in ever the same quarters of the sky, was for them the ideal figure of Divinity. They imagined him in a boat, during the day time sailing resplendent over the heavenly ocean, at night floating down an unknown and mysterious stream, and returning from West to East, there to be re-born into the upper world, after his journey, prodigal of light and joy, among the dead.

The divinities of the second rank, who exercised a certain influence on world and men, but dependent ever on the sun-god, had for their emblem the moon ; for the goddesses, it was the starry firmament or the earth ; for the god of especial benevolence for man, Osiris, it was the Nile, father of Egypt ; for yet other deities, Water, the Desert, etc. Did the Egyptians stop short at these material elements ? Did they fail to reach the spiritual ? the invisible ? We shall show that our answer must be, unhesitatingly, *No*.

Another essential feature in this religion is that it was a mixture of different systems ; it had no unity in the strict sense of the word, especially at first. About 4000 B.C., before the first king, Menes, had established the political unity of Egypt, each tribe was independent, and had its own gods and temples, priests and rites, and beliefs. After the unification, when all Egypt owned one sway, the tribes, confined to their respective homes, continued to preserve their religious autonomy. However, together with political and commercial unification, the fusion of cults and creeds gradually came about. Out of the various pre-existing elements peculiar to the several tribes, a religion more or less common to all Egypt was not long in forming.

Hence that army of gods and goddesses which peopled the Egyptian pantheon. There were more than sixty who received special worship in various places, without counting their attendant crowds of lesser deities. All these gods, come from every point of the compass, ended by taking up different relations one to the other, and finally formed an almost complete hierarchy.

We must, however, insist, at the outset, that this multiplicity was but superficial : it was a multiplicity of titles, not of gods. The supreme Creator god was called Atûm at Heliopolis ; at Memphis, Phtah ; at Hermopolis, in Middle Egypt, Thot ; Amon at Thebes ; Horus at Edfû ; Khnûm at Elephantiné ; but if we examine them minutely, at once we recognize that these divinities have everywhere a like nature, the same attributes and properties, an identical rôle. They differ only in external imagery and in a few accidental features. Ultimately, we have one god under many denominations. The Egyptians were quite aware of this themselves. The worshippers of any local god claimed that he united in himself all the other gods. For the Thebans, the great Amon was Atûm of Heliopolis, Phtah of Memphis, Thot of Hermopolis ; he was all the gods at once, or rather, he was the only true god, possessing within himself, under various names, the fulness of the divine prerogatives.

The same amalgam of notions was revealed in the current beliefs concerning man and the future life. Here, it would seem, unity was even harder of realization, either because the elements essentially defied combination, or because the subject-matter was in itself dark and mysterious.

Thus the Egyptian Religion does not offer itself to our eyes as a well-systematized body of doctrines, with definitely fixed principles, with stable and unshifting foundations, with logical conditions and conclusions which may form a homogeneous whole. It is a mixture of beliefs and cults placed side by side, sometimes harmonious, often disparate, and sometimes even contradictory. In this essay we shall confine ourselves to a general outline and essential characteristics.



## II. GOD AND COSMOGONY

1. *The System of Heliopolis.*—The whole of ancient Egyptian theology is dominated and governed by the system which was formed at Heliopolis, a town not far from the Cairo of to-day. The doctrines which from the earliest times—from between 3000 to 4000 years before our era—were taught in this town, are known to us by means of perfectly authentic documents, *i.e.*, the texts of the fifth dynasty pyramids. Heliopolis was one of the oldest towns of Egypt. Even after the foundation of the great cities of Memphis and of Thebes herself, Heliopolis always remained the religious capital. It was, moreover, the centre of learning; not only was theology taught there, but also all the other sciences then known; thither students flocked from all quarters for instruction and training; there Moses received his education. The University, so to call it, continued to exist till the Roman epoch. To-day Heliopolis has vanished; maize and cotton grow green upon its site; a solitary obelisk still stands upright, lonely and rigid above the waving crops.

According to the doctrine of Heliopolis, in the beginning ocean and darkness alone existed, the primeval waters and a chaos named Nû or Nûn. In this dwelt none but *Atûm* (*Tûm*, he was also called), the first God who was to create and set in order the whole world; and from it he came forth when as yet there was neither heaven nor earth, neither plants nor animals. From it he came forth in the likeness of a Sun, and as in Egyptian *sun* is Râ, he was named Atûm-Râ or Râ-Atûm, or Râ unqualified. During the daytime he was Râ, travelling resplendent over heaven with the sun, and in the night-time Atûm, living his own life while all else is darkness and nothingness, and manifesting himself when and as he wills. When he shines on the horizon he is called by a special name, Râ Khopri, Râ Scarab, that is, to teach that he issues from his own substance and is re-born of his own intrinsic power. For the Egyptians the scarabæus-beetle was at all times the symbol of new birth and resurrection. Scarabs were always most carefully placed in every mummy, over the heart, as emblem and pledge of the dead man's return

to a new life. In pictures, on the walls of subterranean chambers, on funeral papyri, when the sun sails the waters<sup>o</sup> of the rivers of Night, and is on the point of returning to the horizon, he is pictured in his boat as having a human body with a scarab for head; in the daytime, when he traverses the firmament, his body is still human, but his head is that of the hawk of piercing sight, surmounted by the solar disk ringed by the uræus-snake. As Atûm—that is to say, in his rôle of First Principle—his head is always human.

Notice that according to the texts Atûm-Râ comes forth from Chaos, but does not create it. No more than the other nations of antiquity do the Egyptians appear to have had the idea of a creation *ex nihilo*—from nothing. They have some formulæ of striking energy—they cry to Atûm Râ or to Amon Râ: "O Thou who hast made all the gods, all men and all things!" but this making of all things presupposes, in their thought, pre-existing matter, Nû, or chaos. Their *creation* is really *organization*.

In the Heliopolis-doctrine this organization is related in a symbolic, almost cryptic fashion. Atûm-Râ, the first God, who lives of himself, is reproductive within and<sup>o</sup> of himself; he has eight descendants, four male and four female, grouped in four pairs and named in the following order: Shû, Tafnut; Qeb (or Seb), Nût; Osiris, Isis; Set, Nephthys. The last four are but the grandchildren of Atûm-Râ; their parents are Qeb and Nût. This list of nine gods is not always identical. Ten, eleven, twelve, and more are sometimes found, owing to the doubling of certain of the divine functions. Set is often replaced by Horus, and Nephthys by Hat-hor.

The first couple born of Atûm is accordingly Shû and Tafnut. Shû is a god of human form, and is known as the first-born son of Râ. His rôle, in the formation of the world, is to insinuate himself between the two other children of Atûm, Qeb and Nût, to separate them, to uplift Nût, the symbol of Heaven, by the middle of her body, and to hold her aloft, arched like a vault, still touching Qeb, the earth, with her feet in the East and with her hands in the West. Shû therefore is the air,

the atmosphere which supports the firmament. In his numerous statues which still remain to us, Shû is represented kneeling on one knee upon the earth ; his two hands are lifted to the height of his head, and on them, like a heavy burden, rests the sky.

Tafnut, sister of Shû, is a secondary deity of faded importance. She symbolizes the *heat* of the atmosphere, or fire, or light.

The second pair, Qeb and Nût, have well defined functions. Qeb is Earth, the lower world, and Nût Heaven, the higher. These two deities, originally united in a mystic wedlock and then separated by Shû, are the authors of all life that is to be. Qeb is the first father and Nût the first mother, for Atûm is neither father nor mother ; his productive power is single. Nût, as firmament, is mother of the stars : she symbolizes the celestial ocean where sails the solar bark.

Osiris and Isis, the two first-born of Qeb and Nût, are perhaps the best known and widest celebrated of Egyptian gods. Yet they owe this celebrity to a later phase of development, and not to their rôle in the Creation-system of Heliopolis. In it, in all probability, Osiris was the humid element, the fertilizing water, the Nile water, Nile itself ; Isis was at first the fruit-bearing earth, the fertile soil. These two elements, once united, are the source of all the riches of Egypt. Further, Osiris would seem to represent the first man and Isis the first woman.

The last pair, Set and Nephthys, is revealed from the very outset as at war with Osiris and Isis in all their functions. Set is the sterile part of Egypt, the desert, the sands with their perpetual menace to the green valley, Isis and Osiris. Set is also the animal kingdom, and especially the mysterious creature whose home is in the desert and who is the enemy of mankind. Set is, in effect, pictured as a strange animal of whose identity we cannot yet feel sure. As for Nephthys, she would seem to exist only for the sake of parallelism ; in pictures and statues she is a human-headed goddess, clad in a long tunic and carrying on her head the hieroglyph which represents her name.

Such is the myth of Heliopolis—a group of nine, composed of a Creator-god, Atûm Râ, and of his eight descendants, who represent the totality of created things; the creation itself is related by a series of cryptic symbols. The following is a different account, clearer, and not devoid of beauty. It was placed in the mouth of Râ himself:—

I am He that hath made the heavens and the earth, that hath lifted up the mountains, and created all that is upon them.

I am He that hath made the water, and created the great abyss.

I am He that hath created the firmament and covered therewith the two horizons, and I have placed therein the souls of the gods.

I am He who, if he openeth his eyes, produceth Light, and if he closeth them, the Darkness: He that maketh the waters of the Nile to rise at his command: He of whose Name the gods themselves are ignorant.

I am He that maketh the Hours and giveth birth to the Days: I am He that sendeth the feasts of the year, that maketh the inundations.

I am He that maketh the flame of life to rise, that the labours in the fields may be permitted.

In the morning I am Khopri, and at midday Râ, and in the evening Atûm.<sup>1</sup>

The gods of Heliopolis were admitted and recognised by all Egypt; they became national gods, and received worship in the majority of temples.

2. *The Memphis-myth.*—Memphis, one of the first capitals of Egypt, adored from the outset a mysterious god called Phtah. His statues represent him in human form, standing upright, his head shaven, and entirely enveloped as it were with mummy-clothes, from which only his hands emerge. They hold a sceptre pressed against his breast. This picture is symbolic. Phtah filled at Memphis the position of Amon-Râ at Heliopolis. He is Creator of gods and men, and Organizer of the universe; but he himself remains hidden and invisible, not emerging from the darkness to shine like a sun. He was, too, a god of the lower-world, endowed with authority in the kingdom of the dead, and is there called Phtah-Sokar-Osiris, or Sokaris for short. Connected with the cult of Phtah is that of the bull Apis. This bull was called the new life of Phtah, because in him the spirit of the great god was considered to reside. When

<sup>1</sup>Cf. E. Naville, *La Religion des Anciens Egyptiens*, p. 194.

the bull died, the spirit passed into another bull, and Apis was re-born. The highest possible honours were bestowed on it, not, it is quite clear, for its own sake, but because it was held to be the throne of the Divinity. With Phtah is usually associated, as consort, the goddess Sokhmit, "Powerful One," represented always as a statue with a lion's head. To these as child was given Nerfertum, a god human in form. In this way a triad was obtained similar to that of Thebes, Amon, Mut, and Khonsu.

3. *The Hermopolis-myth.*—At Hermopolis, Ashmûneîn in Middle Egypt, the supreme Creator-god was the ibis-headed Thot. This god sank rapidly to a lower rank, and had to be satisfied with appearing under human attributes and as the substitute of Râ. Later, he became the secretary of the gods, judge in the heavens, inventor of the Divine Words, *i.e.*, of hieroglyphs. He it was who taught to men language and writing, mathematics, medicine, and all sciences. Thot did not remain alone: he had produced from his mouth four gods who joined to themselves, later on, four goddesses. At Hermopolis, too, was thus formed a group of nine similar to that at Heliopolis. But the eight secondary gods never had any personal, outstanding, clear-cut character, and are of no importance in Egyptian religion.

4. *The Theban-myth.*—At Thebes in Upper Egypt, the capital of the Middle and Later Empires, the well-known Amon or Amon-Râ was enthroned. The local beliefs were ultimately similar to those of Heliopolis, but they are better known, and seem to us more developed and on a higher plane. Amon, like Atûm, is the primordial deity who has created all and ordered all; he is the king of gods and the supreme master of men, and he, too, is identified with the sun. Various groups form themselves around him; the most important is a triad composed of Amon, the goddess Mut (the "mother"), and their child, Khonsu, a human god. To this triad, considered as a unity, it was sought to attach the eight gods of Heliopolis born of Atûm, so as to form a group of nine. This new group succeeded in attaching to itself yet other divinities, and ended by incorporating in itself nearly all the great

gods of Egypt, associated one with another so as ultimately to fall into nine sets.

Amon-Râ followed the fortunes of Thebes and of the greater Egyptian dynasties, and is certainly the god who received the greatest honours. To him was dedicated that gigantic temple of Karnak upon which every generation spent new labour, and which grew worthy to be considered one of the world's seven marvels. By him inspired, Egyptian religious thought rose, as we shall see, to the highest level that it ever reached. Under the great dynasties a Divine Marriage was devised between Amon-Râ and the Queen, and thence the sovereign was supposed to spring. Amon entered into social life, and had a large share in the direction of human history.

5. *Other Divinities.*—Of the other divinities, we must mention Horus of Edfû, a solar god whose emblem is the winged disk which represents the sun at the moment when, victorious over his foes, he leaps into the air; and Khnûm of Elephantiné, whom the inhabitants of that district—their main trade was pottery—loved to portray as the divine Potter moulding the world and men upon his wheel.

The principal goddesses other than those already named were, Hat-hor, Neith, Bastît, and Maât. Hat-hor is, fundamentally, but another form of the sky-goddess Nût; but in this better-known and more popular shape the goddess rose to the first rank among her fellows, and became the divine representative of women. Her emblem was at first a cow, which was painted as upheld in the hands of Shû, covered, like the firmament, with stars, and carrying on its back the solar bark. Neith was the most important goddess of Lower Egypt, and was honoured especially at Saïs. According to one of her statues, now in the Vatican, she is "the Mother who gave birth to the Sun, and who became a mother when none else had yet borne children." She is generally represented in warlike guise, holding a bow and arrows. Bastît is the goddess of Babastis in Lower Egypt. Cat-headed, sistrum in hand, basket on arm, she presides over dancing, music, and games. Finally, Maât is simply the deified idea of Truth and Justice.

6. *What the Egyptians held concerning the Nature of the Gods.*—Egyptian worship was not pure *Animal Worship* or zoolatry. For a long time all our knowledge of the Egyptians was derived from Greek authors, who were glad to dub the foreigners animal-worshippers. They nurtured, it was remembered, with the greatest care, crocodiles, cats, cynocephalus apes, etc., and paid divine homage to them. But we must distinguish between different periods. In the last period, *i.e.*, from the seventh century B.C. onward, there was indeed a certain animal cult, and we shall refer to it below ; but previously nothing similar can be detected, whether in the most distant reaches of Egyptian history or in the wildest manifestations of the religious spirit. Nothing can be adduced except the cult of the bull Apis at Memphis and of another bull called Mnevis at Heliopolis ; and these animals were, after all, honoured only for the intimate relations which, it was believed, they enjoyed with a deity distinct from themselves.

However, in all epochs alike, in the Egyptian pantheon might be noticed animals or animal-headed gods, and this shocked the artistic susceptibilities of the Greeks not a little. Thot has the head of an ibis ; Amon, a ram's ; Horus, a hawk's ; Khnûm, a ram's ; Anubis, the divine escort of the dead, a jackal's ; Sobk, the water-god and patron of Ombos, and in particular of the Fayûm, a crocodile's ; most of the goddesses have the head of a lioness. What can explain such hideous hybrids ? In default of absolute certainty, we can but offer the most plausible hypothesis. At the origin, each of the nomad tribes which came and established themselves in the Nile valley had its religion and its totem, that is to say, a special animal of which the image was carried on a pole ; it was the standard, the rallying-point of the whole tribe. Moreover, each of these tribes had its god. There was the Ibis-tribe, which worshipped Thot ; the Ram-tribe, which worshipped Amôn ; Horus was the god of the Hawk-tribe. What were the connecting links between god and totem ? And how did these two notions amalgamate, till they ended by forming a single whole ?

That is less clear. Probably when the tribes had become stationary and had built towns, and when, united and incorporated in a single kingdom under a single chief, they built temples and wished to represent their god in visible form, they chose as his emblem the more or less sacred animal which had guided them on their way. Thus they preserved at once their special cults, and an appearance of political independence. The totem, which had ceased to be a rallying-point, became a religious symbol. The hawk came down from his pole, where he had become meaningless, and his head was clapped on to the shoulders of Horus. The god in this composite form summed up in himself the whole life of the clan. The tendency to preserve these personal characteristics to the gods was strengthened by the fact that practically thus only could they be distinguished.

*Polytheism.*—To what grade in the knowledge of the Divine Nature did the Egyptians rise? We must begin by noticing that in their long-drawn history of over four thousand years ideas must inevitably have changed, evolved, been modified not a little; that they could not have been immutable and identical for all the millions of men, who peopled the valley of the Nile. At the first glance, and considered as a whole, Egyptian religion is at all epochs alike purely polytheistic, with a marked inclination, in fact, towards idolatry. The plurality of gods is a fact which stares one in the face: it is everywhere, on all the monuments, in all the texts, in all the temples and the records, over all the face of Egypt. Not a single expression could we find of blame, of condemnation, of rejection; or of clear affirmation of the duty of believing in one only god, or of faintest praise for one who should so believe. Polytheism reigned supreme over this ancient Egypt, as over Assyria and Chaldæa. This polytheism was certainly not the crude idolatry which stops short at the statues of wood and stone; it habitually addressed itself to supra-sensible gods conceived as intelligent and powerful; yet very often, too, it attached itself to the material elements, and in particular to the sun. No doubt the material sun was endowed with higher and



indeed divine attributes—life, intelligence, omniscience, omnipotence; he is called Creator of all things—but the worshipper could with difficulty disengage these attributes from their material subject, and they cannot easily be conceived of as realised elsewhere than in the material sun, so splendid and brilliant, the crowning marvel of the visible world. Idolatry, without being a distinctive characteristic of Egyptian religion, is, none the less, one of its secondary features.

*Hints of Monotheism.*—No doubt, then, remains, that these gods are stamped with the impress of error, polytheism, and idolatry. Yet we may ask whether in this religion, which was part of the life of so many millions of men, no spark of truth ever shone; if across this crass darkness the lightning never flashed which may reveal the one true God; if the theologians, at least, never rose to the conception of a god One, Infinite, and Spiritual; if they never uttered principles which should logically lead to monotheism.

For anyone who reads the texts without prejudice an answer of glad affirmation is the only one possible. Here is an extract from a hymn to Amon:

"The august god, the Lord of all gods, Amon-Râ:

The august Soul which was in the beginning:

The great God who lives of Truth, the god of the first cycle who begat the gods of the other cycles, and who made all the gods:

The unique One, who made all that exists when the earth began to be at the Creation, He of mysterious begettings, of innumerable forms, of whose increasing none can tell. . . .

Sovereign Lord of existence, all that exists is because He is, and when it began to be, nothing existed except Him: from the first dawn of creation He was already the Solar Disk, Prince of the Splendours and the Glories, He whose appearing gives life to men."<sup>1</sup>

It is also said of Amon-Râ:

"He commanded, and the gods were born.

Men came forth from his eyes, and the gods from his mouth. He it is who made the grass for the cattle, and the fruit tree for men; He who createth that whereon live the fishes in the stream and the birds under the heaven; He who putteth the breath in the egg, and nourisheth the son of the worm, and

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Naville, *op. laud.*, p. 123.

produceth the substance of insects, even as of worms and fleas ; He who maketh what is necessary for the mice in their holes and nourisheth the birds on every tree.

It is for love of him that the Nile cometh, he the sweet, the well-beloved : and at his rising men do live.

And this Chief of the gods hath yet his heart open to him that calleth on him.

He protecteth the fearful against the audacious man.

Therefore is He loved and venerated by all that doth exist, in all the height of heaven, in the vastness of the earth, and the depth of the sea.

The gods bow down before thy majesty and exalt their Creator.

They rejoice at the approach of Him who did beget them :

Be praised ! say the wild beasts. Be praised ! saith the Desert.

Thy beauty conquers hearts."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of its numerous incoherences, does not this picture suggest to us the vision of a supreme Being, who has created all things, and gods as well? Of a Being whom all the universe, and the gods themselves, adore? Was not the fit conclusion that He alone deserved the worship of mankind? The hymns are numerous in which identical ideas recur in identical forms. It is no doubt true that it is nowhere declared that there is one only true god and that all the others are false : but the others are all the work of a First and Supreme ; and this first god is unique—unique not only in each individual town, at Memphis or at Thebes, but unique over all the face of Egypt and unique in heaven. It is the same god who, under different names, is everywhere. " He is the Amon who resides in all things, the venerated god who was from the beginning. It is according to his designs that Earth exists. He is Phtah, the greatest of the gods, he who becomes aged and full of years, and then once more a young child, in a duration that lasts eternity."<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere the same god is identified with Atûm of Heliopolis and with Thot of Hermopolis. Yet in spite of their lofty conception of the deity, the Egyptians remained in practice polytheists ; they preserved in their Olympus an army of gods to whom they built temples, put up statues, and offered sacrifice. Like the other pagans of antiquity, they deserved the reproaches

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Adolf Erman, *La religion Égyptienne*, tr. Vidal, pp. 87, 88.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Naville, *op. laud.*, p. 125.

of the Apostle<sup>1</sup>. As for their religious feelings, the solidity of their convictions, their respect for the divine, their confidence in it, the spontaneity of their worship, their zeal in offering sacrifice, their fidelity to the sacred ceremonies and daily exercise of worship—in a word, the practical observance of religion, all this is revealed to us as animated by the greatest loyalty and the most profound sincerity. This is the general tone of all their religious literature; scarcely can one verify one or two isolated texts which betray doubt or indifference, and which insinuate the enjoyment of this present life and its pleasures without thought for the future.

### III. LEGEND OF ISIS AND OSIRIS

Of the numerous legends which crystallized round the gods, none had a wider success than that of Osiris and Isis. We cannot omit it here, for it pervaded Egyptian religion, and was the foundation of all hopes of a future life. This legend is related by Plutarch in his *Isis and Osiris*; but it is to be found in detail even on the oldest of Egyptian monuments.

Osiris, son of Atûm-Râ, had to wife his sister Isis. He was long ago king on earth, after Râ his father, and taught men the doctrines of the good and the practice of virtue. He was the best of all kings; he made his people happy and procured for them all earthly goods, and made peace and justice to rule throughout his kingdom. Now Set, brother of Osiris, urged on by jealousy or by some other motive unmentioned by the legend, resolved to dethrone him and put him to death. The faithful Isis, who had discovered this criminal design, succeeded for some time in foiling the plots of Set; but his skilful intrigues ended by triumphing over Osiris: he seized him, tore him to pieces, and scattered the mutilated fragments to the four winds of heaven and over the waters of the sea. Isis, stripped of all her rights, humiliated, all tears, set out, heart-broken, to search for the remains

<sup>1</sup>Rom. ii. 21.

of Osiris, and gave herself no rest till she had found them. Then, kneeling down beside her sister Nephthys, she uttered this prayer :

" Come to thy home, come to thy home, O God On !  
 Come to thy home, O thou who hast no enemies.  
 O fair youth, come to thy home where thou shalt see me.  
 I am thy sister who loveth thee ; thou shouldst not hold aloof from me,  
 O fairest child, come to thy home. . . .  
 I see thee not, and yet my sorrowful heart goeth toward thee,  
 And mine eyes are all eagerness to see thee.  
 Come to her who loveth thee, thee, O Ünnofriû, the blessed.  
 Come to thy sister, come to thy bride ; come to thy bride,  
 O thou whose heart has ceased to beat.  
 Come to the mistress of thy house.  
 I am thy sister, born of the same mother. Stay not far from me.  
 God and man alike have their face turned to thee, and alike lament thee . . . .  
 I call, and I lament, and my calls and my laments rise up to heaven, but thou hearest not my voice.  
 Yet am I thy sister whom thou lovedst when on earth.  
 Save me, thou lovest none other, O my brother, my brother."<sup>1</sup>

And the greatest of the gods had pity on Isis, and he sent one of his children, Anubis, who embalmed and buried Osiris. Then Osiris began to live once more, not indeed on this earth, but in the other world, where he became God, King, and Judge of the dead. Yet upon earth he had an Avenger in the person of his son Horus, born after his father's death. Horus, brought up by his mother Isis amid a thousand dangers, driven to seek a sanctuary in the desert to escape the implacable pursuit of Set, grew at last to maturity, and dethroned Set, and placed on his own brow the crown of Egypt.

The success of this story was ultimately due to the human elements which are its groundwork : love of justice in Osiris, conjugal fidelity and maternal tenderness in Isis, filial piety in Horus, and, highest of all, the recompense of the righteous in a better world, the final triumph of justice over iniquity, of life over death.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Erman, *op. laud.*, p. 49.

## IV. RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Egyptian mind was fundamentally a religious one. Having built temples for the gods, the people<sup>6</sup> did not leave these empty. Everywhere, amongst the ruins of these monuments, have been found quantities of small objects such as statuettes, tiny steles, etc., which, like the *ex-voto* tablets in our sanctuaries, are indications of the piety of the people. These objects give thanks to the god for having heard some prayer, or invoke him, or praise his goodness and mercy. The most noteworthy of these objects come from Memphis and Thebes.

Similar mental dispositions are indicated in several literary compositions of a moral character, some of which are not without some similarity with the sapiential books of the Old Testament. Such are the *Sentences of Phtah Hotep*, the *Peasant's Complaints*, the *Warnings of a Wise Man*, the *Instructions of Amenemhat*, the *Philosophical Dialogue*, and above all the *Wisdom of Amen-em-opet*. Space will not allow us to describe all these treatises, and we will accordingly confine ourselves to a few words on the last-mentioned work, which would seem to have provided a few sentences for the Proverbs of Solomon.

The treatise of Amen-em-opet is contained in a British Museum papyrus (No. 10474) published in facsimile, with transcription and a translation by Sir Wallis Budge.<sup>1</sup> It comprises 27 columns, with, in all, 551 lines.

The work is divided into thirty chapters, with a long prologue. It was apparently composed about the tenth or ninth century B.C. The teaching it contains is noble and elevated.

It deals with social relations, but the aim of the author is not to set forth the first principles of the natural law, which he takes for granted, but he penetrates more deeply into the sphere of conscience. He mentions and condemns the blameworthy acts which usually escape control, such as illicit and corrupt methods of rounding off one's field, or of increasing one's gain.

<sup>1</sup>*Facsimiles of Egyptian hieratic papyri in the British Museum. Second Series, London, 1923. The Teaching of Amen-em-opet, 1924.*

The writer takes pains to defend the weaker classes of society. He demands respect for the aged, the widows, and the poor. He condemns all abuse of power or authority. He recommends moderation in the search for riches :

Better is poverty in the hand of God than the riches in the shop.  
Better is bread when the heart is joyful than riches with regrets.

Amen-em-opet has a remarkable sense of justice and of the moral order. He speaks, not as a censor, but as a counsellor, or as a friend. He is a herald of the conscience, an interpreter of the divine law written upon the human heart.

He is deeply religious, and bases his teaching not on human laws, but on the first cause of all justice, God. He has a very high idea of God. To designate him, he uses for preference (26 times) the general term *p-noute*, "God," as the Copts do later on. In his mind, this "god" without a special name is doubtless the supreme God of Egypt, Râ, or Amon-Râ. We have here a tendency towards monotheism. Nevertheless, he is a conservative, and does not deny the divinities of his ancestors. To each he continues to ascribe his traditional office. Khoum-Râ remains the master of the tower in which creatures are fashioned. Thot is the divine scribe, represented on earth by the Ibis and the cynocephalus. Râ is the sun, which presides over the day, and the Moon-god watches over the night. These various functions inspire some of his strongest sentiments.

When weighing, one may deceive men, but there is an invisible observer whom none can escape :

The cynocephalus is seated in front of the scales,

He carefully watches the leaden wire.

Woe to the one who falsifies writings or measures ! :

The finger of the scribe is the beak of the Ibis, take care not to divert it.

The bushel is the eye of Râ.

Towards the gods he recommends trust and confidence :

Address thy prayer to Aton when he arises.

Say to him : Give me salvation and health.

He will give thee the necessities of life,

And thou shalt be delivered from all fear.

He will not have a man cherish thoughts of vengeance

against one who has done him wrong :

For thou knowest not the counsels of God,

Nor if thou shalt see the morrow.

Rest thyself between the arms of God,

Thy silence will vanquish them.

A special interest attaches for us to this "wisdom" inasmuch as some of its sentences resemble a section of the "Proverbs of Solomon," xxii. 17-xxiii. 11. It is a remarkable fact that this section is found almost complete in the treatise of Amen-em-opet. The order is different, but the sentences are identical. The relations are even so close that the Egyptian has been utilised by several writers to explain some puzzling passages in the Hebrew. Also, it has been generally admitted that the sacred author was acquainted with the treatise of Amen-em-opet, and took from it some sentences, which he incorporated in his Book of Proverbs. But it has been pointed out that we are in presence here, not of an ordinary plagiarism, nor of a servile translation, but rather of an adaptation. The Egyptian document has been remodelled and revised to such an extent that the text in Proverbs constitutes a new text, and one animated above all by a new spirit, the fear of Jahweh and of trust in Him.

## V. MAN AND HIS DESTINY

*Immortality of the Soul.*—For the Egyptian, man was composed of a body, a soul, and a third element which was called Kâ, and which, with the French, we may translate *double*. In the paintings the Kâ is in fact often represented standing behind the individual in question, in appearance identical with him; in short, his vaguer replica. The nature and function of this element are extraordinarily obscure. It was conceived as a sort of invisible genius or shadow, which accompanied each person, or perhaps dwelt within him; which was born with him, but which survived him, and after his death continued to manifest an interest in his soul and his body. Whatever we may hold about the Kâ, whether we regard it as distinct from the soul, which is the common opinion of Egyptologists, or as identical with it (which is far harder), it is absolutely certain and universally admitted

that the Egyptians had the most obstinate belief in a future life, and, in consequence, in the survival of an essential part of man. This belief is what is most outstanding, and in the most vigorous relief, in the Egyptian soul. To realize it, one need but cast a glance at their monuments and funerary literature. Chaldæa, Assyria, Greece, may boast of their temples; but if there is one thing which is unique in this world, and which is peculiar to the Nile valley, it is assuredly those gigantic tombs which are the Pyramids, those subterranean chambers bored vertically for 70 or 80 feet into the sheer rock, as at Saqqarah, or tunnelled into the mountain to a depth of 650 feet as at Thebes; and it is those mummies which were so well embalmed that the lapse of more than 3,000 years has left them as perfect as when they left the hands of the embalmers. Why these huge labours, this scrupulous care, these multiplied precautions, if nothing of man survived to reap and enjoy the fruits of them in an existence beside whose lengths the span of mortal life might count as naught? Do not seek an adequate explanation in pride, in a vanity anticipatory of the joys of having a tomb impenetrable, and flesh that never should corrupt. Though this motive may have played its part, and however great may have been the force of standing custom, that is certainly not the source of the principle itself, the imperious principle which dominates all Egyptian burial, and which dictates that at all costs the body must be preserved from corruption and must keep its limbs entire. This principle could only follow from a belief in a future life, whatever its conditions might be.

Besides, written documents exist, and are decisive, and make all doubt impossible. The most important of these documents is the *Book of the Dead*. It is one of the world's most ancient texts: it dates from the earliest dynasties, and extracts are found graven on the latest tombs. It was so popular and so useful in the other life that everyone was eager to take it with him into his grave. One of the most important services one



could render to the dead man was to furnish him with a complete copy of the book, or at least with a transcription of its essential parts. Now, not only does this book explicitly affirm the immortality of the soul,<sup>1</sup> but by its very nature and aim it presupposes and exacts it, so much so, that without this belief the book would be utterly pointless and lose all *raison d'être*. In fact, it is a collection of various documents which may serve to instruct the soul in all that it must accomplish in the other world—incantations to be made, prayers to be recited, formulæ to be repeated before the gods and the genii who guard the dwellings beneath the earth; it tells of the canals to be crossed, and the means of finding a bark; of pathways to be followed in order to reach the fields of bliss; the plan of the most formidable spots; the portraits of the most alarming foes—in fact, a regular guide, an illustrated guide, to the lower world. Whatever name be given to the part of man which goes on living, or rather which lives with a new sort of life, it is certain that it implies a continuation, a prolongation of personality; it is still the same individual who existed upon earth and who still exists, and who repeats again and again such words as these :

I am I, [his name follows here] ;

I stand upright :

I live : I have all my limbs.

I begin myself anew.

The belief in another life is therefore one of the best established points in Egyptian Religion. Let us follow the soul through this new phase.

THE JUDGEMENT.—Immediately after death, the deceased underwent a judgement before Osiris and forty-two other judges, his assessors. This judgement scene is celebrated, and is reproduced on almost all the funerary papyri, which are preserved in great numbers, and which are, in fact, simply extracts of great or less length taken from the Book of the Dead. The Judgement is in chapter 125.

Osiris, the god of the dead, is seated on his throne ;

<sup>1</sup>For instance, in chapter 44, where we read " I die not a second time in the Nether World." Le Page Renouf, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, London, 1904, p. 101.

at his side are ranged, sceptre in hand, the forty-two judges ; before him is a balance, and in one scale is placed a leaf, the symbol of Righteousness ; in the other the heart of the deceased. Anubis, the god who had buried Osiris, weighs the heart ; Thot, the scribe of the gods, writes the results ; in a corner lurks a hideous monster, to execute, if necessary, the sentence. In front, the deceased watches the weighing, and by no means impassively ; for he speaks, he proclaims his innocence. This is when the *Negative Confession* takes place. Transporting himself in thought to this supreme moment when his eternity is being decided for him, the Egyptian could hear, clear and distinct, each cry of his conscience ; he could discriminate most vividly every obligation of the moral law which was written in the very depths of his being ; not one of them does he dismiss ; he realizes acutely all their gravity ; he understands that the disregarding of them merits punishment, that to observe them merits rewards. He knows that there is one only way to salvation, and that is innocence and justice. And so a proclamation of perfect innocence is put into his mouth.

Hence the *Negative Confession* gives us a standard whereby to measure the Egyptian code of morals :—

#### THE NEGATIVE CONFESSION

Hail to thee, mighty God, Lord of Righteousness.

I am come to thee, O my Lord : I have brought myself that I may look upon thy glory. I know thee and I know the name of the forty-two gods who make their appearance with thee in the Hall of Righteousness, devouring those who harbour mischief, and swallowing their blood, upon the Day of the searching examination in presence of Unneferu.

Verily, "Thou of the Twain Eyes, Lord of Righteousness," is thy name. Here am I ; I am come to thee ; I bring to thee Right, and have put a stop to Wrong.

I am not a doer of wrong to men.

I am not one who slayeth his kindred.

I am not one who telleth lies instead of truth.

I am not conscious of treason : I am not a doer of mischief.

I do not exact as the first-fruits of each day more work than should be done for me.

My name cometh not to the Bark of the god who is at the Helm.

I am not a transgressor against the god.

I am not a tale bearer : I am not a detractor.  
 I am not a doer of that which the gods abhor.  
 I hurt no servant with his master.  
 I cause no famine : I cause no weeping.  
 I am not a murderer : I give not orders for murder.  
 I cause not suffering to men.  
 I reduce not the offerings of the temples : I lessen not the cakes  
 of the gods.  
 I rob not the dead of their funeral food.  
 I am not an adulterer.  
 I am undefiled in the sanctuary of the god of my domain.  
 I neither increase nor diminish the measures of grain.  
 I am not one who shorteneth the palm's length.  
 I am not one who cutteth short the field's measure.  
 I put not pressure upon the beam of the balance.  
 I snatch not the milk from the mouth of infants.  
 I draw not the cattle from their pastures.  
 I net not the birds of the manors of the gods.  
 I catch not the fish of their ponds.  
 I stop not the water at its appointed time.  
 I divide not an arm of the water in its course.  
 I extinguish not the lamp during its appointed time.  
 I do not defraud the Divine Circle of their sacrificial joints.  
 I drive not away the cattle of the sacred estate.  
 I stop not a god when he cometh forth.  
 I am pure, I am pure, I am pure, I am pure.<sup>1</sup>

And again, addressing each of the forty-two assessors by name, he ends thus :—

"Be ye praised, O Gods, I know you, and I know your names. Let me not fall beneath your sword. Say not to this god, O you who belong to his suite, anything that is evil against me. Speak the truth concerning me to the Lord of all that exists, for I have done in Egypt that which is just ; I have not injured the god, and the king did not have to busy himself about me. I have done what men do say and what doth satisfy the gods ; I have contented the gods with that which is their pleasure ; I gave bread to the hungry and water to him that thirsted, clothes to the naked and a boat to him that had no boat. I gave offerings to the gods, and funeral alms to the glorified Ones (=the Dead)."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the Egyptians held as certain that every human

<sup>1</sup>Le Page Renouf, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, London, 1904, p. 212-214.

<sup>2</sup>*Book of the Dead*, ch. 125.

action met with its sanction in the other life. This position cannot be disputed, and in fact is not. This belief is directly affirmed in the Later Empire, and even in the middle Empire, which leads us back into the third millennium before Christ. Until recently not many clear traces could be found of it in documents previous to the Middle Empire, and many Egyptologists had proposed the hypothesis that this idea of sanction was in fact unknown to the early Egyptians. However, a tomb of the sixth dynasty has recently been discovered which bears inscriptions containing fragments of the Negative Confession, and which speaks explicitly of the judgement. "I shall be judged by the Great God, Lord of the West, in the place where Truth is" (or, according to a variant rendering, in the place where judgement is given). In consequence the deceased proclaims his innocence: "I have told no lies before the judge: I have sworn no false oaths."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the idea of sanction is found in the Early Empire, and would appear to be a primordial notion of the Egyptians.

RETRIBUTION.—1. *The Fate of the Wicked*.—Written in advance and to order, the manuscripts of the *Book of the Dead* naturally never condemn the property owner. The fate of the wicked is scarcely mentioned in documents, save for a few short allusions, or for scenes depicted in tombs. It would seem that the wicked were devoured by the assessing judges, or else they became the prey of hideous monsters, serpents, or dragons, or else they were even compelled to enter into the bodies of unclean animals, and to return to the earth, there to lead an unhappy life.

2. *The Reward of the Righteous*.—According to the *Book of the Dead*, when the judgement is concluded, Osiris pronounces this sentence:

"Let him go forth justified wheresoever he wishes, near to the spirits and the gods. He will not be in any wise repulsed by the guardian of the gates of the Amenti. Give him his food and his offerings."

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<sup>1</sup>J. Capart, *Funeral Chamber of the Sixth Dynasty*, 1906, p. 25, Plate III (in French).

Chapter 126, which follows immediately upon the description of the judgement, has as a vignette a basin filled with water, with flames on either side, and four cynocephali to guard it. The text indeed speaks of purification: "Enter, O such an Osiris; we remove all evil from thee; we take away all that is disordered in thee. Enter, and cross with confidence the threshold of Amenti."

Amenti is the Kingdom of the Dead. The Egyptians, who were not afraid to think about death, and who when they were able prepared their own tombs while still alive, and who delighted to decorate and embellish these while they neglected the house in which they were living, also took pleasure in contemplating the dwelling place of the dead by endeavouring to imagine the kind of life led there. Thus they composed several books, in which they describe the lower world, and the peregrinations of the dead. We will content ourselves here with drawing therefrom a general idea which, it would seem, was common throughout Egypt.

In the mind of the people, Amenti was another Egypt, happy and flourishing, in which the ancestors, gathered together under the crook of Osiris, gave themselves up to their chosen distractions. The entry thereto was made with the setting sun by the door of the West, and the realm extended beneath the earth in undetermined regions. After illuminating the living during the daytime, the sun, Râ, rose over the realm of the dead, passed across it with all its attendants, and thus returned to the East, to renew once more its course in the firmament of the heavens. Thus the living and the dead enjoyed its benefits in turn.

In Amenti, the occupations were more or less the same as those on earth, but without pain or suffering. There giant harvests increase of themselves, the corn being laden with heavy ears; there on the trees ripened exquisite fruits which could be gathered simply by stretching forth the hand; there streams of delicious waters wound through the land, irrigating the ever-fertile plains, and dotted with boats wafted by the breeze.

For the rest, the "happy ones," as they were called, enjoyed the greatest freedom. They could, if they so chose, return to their tomb, stay there, and consume the good things offered by their friends.

At the time of the New Empire, there was ascribed to the blessed a happiness which apparently was at the beginning reserved as a privilege for the Pharaohs. When the evening came to him, bringing back the darkness into Amenti, he was able to leave, ascend once more to the earth, and contemplate the sun which was then shining for the living. He could even ascend into the azure vault, and enter in the ship of the sun which was travelling across the firmament, and take his place with the gods who formed the bodyguard of Râ, contemplate them, speak with them and, what is more, sit at their table. This favour was contained in the sentence of Osiris: "Let him go forth justified wheresoever he wishes, near to the spirits and the gods."

Such was the idea formed by the Egyptians of the other life—a simple and naive idea, in truth, but at the same time one which, for so early a people, is not lacking in nobility and dignity.

The "respondents."—We would perhaps have given too attractive a picture of the other world if we omitted to mention at least one of the features which darken it—namely, the custom of placing with the mummy in the tomb a quantity of statuettes in enamelled earth which archæology calls the "respondents" (Egyptian: *oushabtis*). They appear already in the Middle Empire, carrying only the name of the deceased person. In the New Empire, they are multiplied, and generally bear an inscription which indicates their precise object:

"O Oushabti, if so-and-so is called upon for the work which is done down below, as a person is called on for duty, to cultivate the fields, water the borders of the river, transport the sand from East to West, say that I am here."

Thus they did not exclude from the other world the idea of being called upon for fatigues, but they hoped to avoid this by substituting servants in their place. The god who was able to impose upon the dead the task of digging and

of working could very well, apparently, give life to an earthen image, and why should he not accept its services? Thus it was necessary to take with one a sufficient number of these cheap substitutes, intended to "respond" to the name of the dead person, and to carry out all the work imposed.

## VI. END OF THE EGYPTIAN RELIGION

Such was the general aspect of Egyptian Religion during long centuries. Six or seven hundred years before our era it embarked on a career of decadence. Then begins, to last until the introduction of Christianity, that unchecked cult of animals which Herodotus describes to us. These animals, which the ancients had in some sense mingled with their worship as symbols of the Deity, now ascended the altars in their own persons, and, if they do not actually evict the gods, at least they relegate them to the second rank. Serpents, crocodiles, birds, cats, rams, are treated as sacred objects, and are revered as much as, or more than, the statues of Amon-Râ and Osiris, are embalmed, mummified, and buried with divine honours. Incalculable is the number of the sacred animals which modern discoveries have brought back to light, buried with all the flattery and luxury which in old days only the rich and powerful could afford. Immense cemeteries full of them are found, side by side with the ancient burying-places of lords and kings. Cats emerge from their trenches in hundreds of thousands, each carefully swaddled in its bandages, protruding a desiccated head. Whole families of crocodiles come forth from hole and cavern, carrying at times within them precious papyri, which were used to stuff them. Hawks, ibis, serpents, fish, are delivered up by the broken potsherds, and lie in heaps among the relics. It really seems as if the men of those generations, victims of some extraordinary mental aberration, lavished more care on the sepulture of a cat than on that of their father or mother.

Under the Ptolemies (c. 300–30 B.C.) decadence moves headlong, in spite of the exterior pomp and circumstance

of the religious ceremonies. The new rulers of Egypt realized what an advantage they could draw from the national religion as a prop for their power, and they used the old beliefs as an instrument of government. Not only did they leave them all liberty, but they vied with one another in exalting their prestige. They respected the privileges of the sacerdotal caste, took part in processions and the divine ritual, restored the temples and enriched them with the most sumptuous adornment. Most of the sanctuaries still standing in Egypt are the work of the Ptolemies. In return, the people set no bounds to their veneration for these worthy successors of the Pharaohs ; the priests decreed divine honours to them as in the days of Rameses and Thotmes.

And yet all this gaudy display was but a surface phenomenon : it lacked that spontaneity, that sincerity, which proceeds from the heart's inner self. The grand religious notions of yore had for all time deserted the Egyptian soul. The whole of Egypt sank deeper and deeper into the slough of animal worship. The rôles are reversed : man is no longer lord of the animals, but they become his masters. One must suffer oneself to be stung by snakes, devoured by crocodiles, rather than cause them the slightest injury by trying to defend oneself. A Roman who by accident had killed a cat was murdered by the mob (Diodorus Siculus, i. 84). The inhabitants of the Cynopolite nome (in Middle Egypt) caught and ate a certain fish venerated by the inhabitants of the neighbouring nome of Oxyrhynchus. A sacred war was at once declared, and the Oxyrhynchites captured the dog adored by the Cynopolites and cut its throat (Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 72). Crocodiles were kept in sacred cisterns at enormous expense (Strabo, xvii. 38). The author of the *Book of Wisdom*, who lived at Alexandria about 150 B.C., and who was in consequence an eyewitness of these horrors, had no need at all to strain his imagination when he wrote (xi. 16, 17) : " In punishment of the insane imaginings of their iniquity, for that some of them in their folly adored dumb serpents and senseless beasts, Thou didst send upon them a multitude of dumb animals for Thy vengeance, that they



might know that whereby a man sinneth, thereby is he likewise punished." No doubt the Egyptian generations contemporary with the Exodus had deserved these words of reproach, for they too had had an exaggerated cult for animal-emblems of their gods ; but with far greater reason were they addressed to the Egyptians of these last six centuries, who abased their animal fetishism to the most degrading practices.

Such was the religion of the people. Was that of the higher classes the self-same? At Alexandria and in the other towns where the Greek element was dominant, we cannot doubt but that the thinking and literary classes were gradually detaching themselves from the old beliefs, or rather, were tending to modernize, that is, to Hellenize them. Greece, at that time, meant Science, Philosophy, in a word, Civilization. The attraction Greece universally exercised drew men likewise toward the Greek religion. Accordingly we can see the gods of Olympus making their way into the ancient circles of the Heliopolitan or Theban deities ; Zeus ascends the temple thrones of Osiris or of Amon ; Aphrodité takes her place at the side of Isis. As ideas advance, many of the ancient national divinities are actually forgotten ; only a few of them remain : Osiris, Isis, Horus, Thot. Even so, care is taken to strip them of their rigidity and hieratic outline ; to deliver them from the bands which swathe them ; to set them at their ease among the lithe and supple Greeks. Horus becomes Harpocrates, a charming child who likes to go for rides on goose or ram, the sacred animals of Amon ; or else holds his finger to his lips, and so becomes named God of Silence. Or again, we meet him disguised in Greek attire, and on his arm rests a basket, or a horn of Plenty. His mother Isis, too, was obliged, if she was still to find worshippers, to put on the characteristics of Aphrodité. Osiris, at Alexandria, had to retire into the background before great Serapis, or else to identify himself with this new god, imported from Sinopé in Asia Minor by Ptolemy II on the advice of a dream. Serapis installed himself in a luxurious temple in the very heart of Alexandria, and remained the favourite god of the citizens until they were converted to Christianity.

In the first Christian century Egyptian Religion was but a hotch-potch of Greek and Egyptian elements.

In this shape it subsisted for some time still, in the Delta towns especially, side by side with the new Faith. Christianity spread with extraordinary rapidity up the entire valley of the Nile ; in the third century the majority of the population was already Christian. The last vestiges of the old worship are to be found in the sixth century in the temple of Isis at Philæ.

### CONCLUSION

Religious the Egyptians certainly were, and more so, perhaps, than the other nations of antiquity, as Herodotus remarked. They were religious by temperament, good, upright, earnest, of an endurance which stood all tests, easily given to reverie beneath a sky that was always blue, with a calm and peaceful life, consisting of a constant and regular round of occupations. Quite naturally, and without effort, they rose to the knowledge of God. They even formed a fairly correct and fairly complete notion of several of his attributes. They knew that there was one Creator of all things, heaven and earth, gods and men, a supreme and independent Master, a righteous Lord who is good and who loves men, taking care of them, looking to their necessities, and providing for all his creatures. They proclaimed themselves to be his servants, with a sincere heart. They were conscious that some day they would have to give an account of all their actions before an incorruptible judge, and that good and evil would have in the next life an eternal sanction. This was sufficient for their moral life. But these were particles of truth mixed up with the dross of error, and they did not succeed in gathering together the attributes which they so nobly conceived and uniting them in one single Being, for like all the peoples of antiquity they were good polytheists. They even went further still, and on their altars they placed creatures made for their service, such as unclean animals ; they bowed down before serpents, and sank into the mire of the most shameful practices. For them more perhaps than for the others was there a pressing need of the Truth which makes men free.

## APPENDIX

The treatise of the old Bœotian and priest, Plutarch of Chæronea, upon Isis and Osiris, deserves to be mentioned in these pages. It marks the highest point of Greek philosophical reflection when it was applied to the old Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris, which in a mystical and sublimated form attained enormous popularity in the first two or three Christian centuries. In it we see the old Egyptian worship of Truth still accentuated, and, in accordance with the philosophy of the time, the transcendent unity of the divine nature is much stressed, the anthropomorphic mythology being allegorized away.

To call the Nile or other natural phenomena "*God*," Plutarch argues (p. 377, C), or the vine *Dionysus*, implies no more than the calling the rudder the *pilot*, or medicine the *healer*. It would be absurd if we meant it literally. "For not mindless, nor soulless, is God, nor an instrument in human hands." God is one and eternal, though many-named, just as sun and moon are one, though called differently by different nations. "We use," he continues (p. 378, A), "consecrated symbols, some enigmatic, some transparent, in our guidance of man's thought to the Divine. Yet not without danger! For some do lose their foothold, and roll headlong into superstition, and others, shunning superstition as a slough, fall, before they know it, over the cliff of atheism." Living human creatures, he insists (382, B), are better "mirrors" of God than the richest statues. And through it all, truth is being sought, "for (p. 351, C) there is no gift greater for man to take nor more august for God to give, than Truth." The attaining of truth explains Immortality; for (*ib.*, E) "if thought and intelligence of things were taken from us, immortality would be no life, but merely time." The story of Osiris, rent by his enemy, and gathered into one by Isis, means that Sin strains to tear asunder the divine Word within us, which the goddess (whose name he derives from *eidenai*, to know) reunites; and they are in truth and justice named "carriers of sacred things" and "adorners of sacred things" (two Egyptian ritual offices), "who carry about in their soul, as in a shrine,

the sacred Word about the gods, pure of all superstition and exaggeration, and in their soul adorn it " (352, B). And the Isiac devotee was buried in his religious habit to show (*ib.*) that " this divine Word is with him, and that possessing it and naught beside he makes his journey thither."

In what is perhaps his sublimest passage (382, E) he explains the mysterious existence of Osiris and the soul in the Hidden World beyond death.

" This thing that our priests to-day, with prayer for mercy and in dim revelation, most reverently do hint, even that Osiris is King and Lord among the dead, bewilders the minds of most men who know not how the truth of this thing is. For they fancy that Osiris, in whom most surely is all holiness of God and nature, is thus said to be in the earth and beneath the earth, where are hidden the bodies of those who seem to have had their end. But Osiris' self is far indeed from earth, untouched, undefiled, immaculate of all substance that admits of corruption and of death. And souls of men, here in the embrace of bodies and of passions, have no communion with the God save as in a dream, a dim touch of knowledge through philosophy. But when they are set free, and shift their homes into that Formless and Invisible and Impassible and Pure, then in truth is God their leader and their king, even this God, so that fastened unto Him, and insatiably contemplating and desiring that Beauty ineffable and indescribable of man—whereof the old legend would have it that Isis was in love, and did ever pursue and with it consort—all beings there are fulfilled of all the good and fair things that have share in creation."

As for Isis, in these words does she address one who in his distress had invoked her<sup>1</sup> :—

" Lo, I am here, Lucius, moved by thine entreaty, I, parent of nature, lady of the elements, firstborn of the ages, crown of godhead, queen of the dead, first in heaven, unific vision of gods and goddesses, who at my nod govern the luminous towers of the sky, the healthful breezes of the sea, the lamentable silences of hell, whose single Power in myriad symbol, in varying rite, in manifold name, the whole world does worship." And she recites the long roll of names by which the one mother-godhead was now conceived of as invoked. " I am here, pitying thy distress, I am here, favourable and propitious. Put away tears and leave lament, and groan no more, for in my providence thy day of salvation has dawned."

It will be seen that a worship doomed to almost immediate decay could still inspire such different characters as the pious old Greek priest and the licentious African to genuine worship.

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<sup>1</sup>Appuleius, *Metamorphoses*, xi. 5.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This essay was apparently the last work from the learned pen of Père Mallon, for he died on April 7th, 1934, at the comparatively early age of 59 years, to the great loss of Biblical Scholarship.

May he enjoy the reward of his labours.

The manuscript has been seen through the press by the General Editor.

# THE RELIGION OF BABYLONIA AND ASSYRIA

By Rev. A. CONDAMIN, S.J.

## ~ I. GEOGRAPHY—HISTORICAL SOURCES

THE peoples who form the subject matter of this essay inhabited Mesopotamia, the great plain of the Euphrates and the Tigris, from about 3500 B.C. to 500 B.C. In the southern part, which the ancient inscriptions call *Sumer*, the chief cities were (proceeding from south to north) Eridu, Ur, Larsa, Uruk, Lagash, Umma, Shuruppak, and Nippur. A little higher up, where the two rivers approach closest to each other, there were Borsippa, Babylon, Kish, Kutha, Sippar, and Agadé, all belonging to the country of *Akkad*, the name of which is ordinarily linked with that of *Sumer*.

The southern portion of *Sumer*, bordering on the Persian Gulf, and inhabited by the *Kaldu*, often at war with the Babylonians, was called *Chaldea*. From the seventh century B.C., this name was extended to all the country from the sea as far as Babylon. On the other hand, the importance of Babylon itself led the Greeks to give to all this country the name of *Babylonia*.

The fertility of the country was due above all to a clever system of irrigation, by means of canals which were carefully kept in order from the earliest times.

To the Sumerians, a *non-Semitic* race, is ascribed the invention of the cuneiform script. (This was a very complicated form of script, of pictographic origin, in which the linear signs gradually took the form of *pins* or *wedges*, whence the name "cuneiform," from the Latin *cuneus* = wedge.)

However far back we trace their history, we find the population of *Sumer* including some Semitic elements. In the country of *Akkad*, during the third millenium B.C., the Semites predominated, but Sumerians were also present. During the second millenium, the Semites became the masters of the country, as far as the south, and absorbed the Sumerian element.

The texts known to us at the present day enable us to trace the history of the kingdom of Assyria as far back as the twenty-third century before Christ. The chief city was *Asshûr*, on the banks of the Tigris, about 200 miles to the north of Babylon. *Nineveh*, which lay about 55 miles to the north of *Asshûr*, did not become the capital city of the kingdom until the last kings, Sennacherib, Asarhaddon, Assurbanipal and his sons; it then held this position until its ruin in 612 B.C. The inscriptions of the kings of Assyria are in the *Akkadian* language (Semitic). The Assyrians were distinguished from the Babylonians above all by their warlike and more savage customs.

Till the middle of last century, Babylonian and Assyrian religion was known to us only through the meagre information and allusions furnished by the Bible and profane authors and, in particular, by a few fragments of the writings of Berosus, a priest of the temple of Bel at Babylon about 175 B.C. Research in Assyria and Babylonia has, since 1842, excavated the ruins of the ancient towns, Nineveh, Asshûr, Babylon, Nippur, Lagash, Kish, etc., unearthed temples and palaces, and brought to light a mass of texts, in cuneiform script, of every epoch from the fourth millenium to the last centuries before our era. Historical and votive inscriptions, annals and records of the kings, collections of religious documents, rituals, incantations, hymns, litanies, prayers of various sorts, long lists containing names of divinities and of temples, epics, myths, legends, astrological texts, laws, a great many deeds and contracts, the correspondence of officials and private persons—this immense literature is a rich mine of information about the religion of Babylonia and Assyria. A large and very interesting portion of it is contained in the 20,000 tablets which belonged to the library of Asshurbanipal, and are to-day in the British Museum. The inscriptions and remains of various kinds to-day amount to tens of thousands in the various museums of Europe and America. Since 1922, the British Museum and the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania have collaborated in the excavating of Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, and already many remarkable discoveries have been made there.<sup>1</sup>

To avoid rash generalizations and hasty comparisons in the history of Religions, it is of prime importance to note, at the outset, that our knowledge of Assyro-Babylonian religion is, in many points, *incomplete* and *provisional*.

1. A small part only of the texts buried beneath the sands of the Tigris and Euphrates plains has as yet been discovered ; and even of those stored in museums, a mere

<sup>1</sup>H. R. Hall, C. Leonard Woolley, C. J. Gadd, Sir Arthur Keith, *Ur Excavations* (since 1927), Léon Legrain, Sidney Smith, E. R. Burrows, *Ur Excavations, Texts*. (Publications of the Joint Expedition of the British Museum and of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania to Mesopotamia.)

fraction has been published: and of this not all has seriously been studied.

2. We do not know the date of the composition of many of these texts, and this applies especially to cases where we possess only copies of earlier texts, as in the tablets in the library of Asshurbanipal.

3. Sumerian Religion had many features in common with that of the Semites, and it is impossible to distinguish clearly what features properly belonged to each, and to determine the part played by borrowed elements and influences.

4. The greater number of documents (royal inscriptions, hymns, rituals, etc.) give us information on the *official* religion, or on the speculations of the priest theologians; the religion of the populace is less known to us.

## II. THE BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN PANTHEON. POLYTHEISM OR MONOTHEISM? THE NAME OF YAHWEH

A few authors, especially the late Professor A. H. Sayce, of Oxford, working as far back as possible towards the source of Babylonian religion, and striving to disentangle Sumerian from Semitic elements, mistakenly reduce Sumerian religion to *Animism* or the cult of spirits. According to others, Babylonian religion was at first purely *astral* in character. F. X. Kugler, S.J., astronomer and Assyriologist, has refuted the main arguments by which Winckler and A. Jeremias support this theory.

Babylonia was not, in those distant ages, a united and homogeneous kingdom; it was divided into "a number of little independent states formed by each several city. Each of these cities was consecrated to a god, who was regarded as its real sovereign," and in whose name ruled a *viceroys* (Sumerian, *isak*; Semitic, *ishshakku*; in ideographic script, *patesi*). A well-known Assyriologist, L. W. King, describes for us the Pantheon of this early epoch as follows:—

"In the most literal sense of the phrase the Babylonian may be said to have formed his gods in his own image . . . . Even in the early periods of Sumerian history the city-god was merely an



enlarged reflection of the patesi, or human ruler of the city, who was his representative and counterpart . . . . A large company of gods were members of his household and ministered to his wants or served him as officers of state. Thus it was the privilege of special deities to act as his cup-bearer, the keeper of his harim, or the driver of his chariot; others were musicians and singers; others again were shepherds, land-stewards, architects, or inspectors of fishing and irrigation; while more important deities were his counsellors of state, or the generals who planned his campaigns and looked to the defence of his city. When it is recalled that even in the earliest historical periods many other deities were worshipped in most of the cities in addition to the city-god, and that each of these had his own household and divine attendants, one reason will be apparent for the large number of gods whose names were known to the later Babylonians and Assyrians, even if their origin and functions were often obscure."<sup>1</sup>

In the course of centuries larger states were formed, and several divinities, possessing some unusual similarity of character or attribute, were fused into a single god. The importance of a god depended largely on that of the town whose special patron he was. The chief god of the city which had acquired suzerainty over others became supreme god of the kingdom. Thus, in the time of Hammurabi (almost certainly the Amraphel of Genesis xiv.), about 2000 B.C., Mardûk, god of Babylon, became principal god of the kingdom. This would not prevent a host of secondary gods existing at his side. The names of these are mainly preserved in incantations, which were prayers considered efficacious in proportion as they invoked a greater number of gods: the series entitled *Shurpu* names about 150.

Little by little, groups and theological systems were formed. Several divinities were interconnected; the rôle and relations of each became defined. At the head of the Pantheon we find ANU, god of the sky, the father and king of gods, the god *par excellence*, whose most ancient and most important sanctuary was in the town of Uruk; ENLIL, god of earth, who determines the destiny of beings, and whose principal city was Nippur; EA, god of the ocean, and god of wisdom, the arts, and of writing, honoured specially at Eridu.

When, under Hammurabi, Babylon became, for nearly

<sup>1</sup>*Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets, etc., in the British Museum*, part xxiv., 1908, p. 5.

2,000 years, the religious centre of all Babylonia, MARDUK, its god, was elevated by the priests to the supreme rank ; in the Creation-poem he is proclaimed Lord of Heaven and Earth, Master of the destiny of Gods and Men. Henceforward, NÂBÛ (Nebo), the god of Borsippa (a town older, perhaps, than Babylon itself) becomes the "well-beloved son of Marduk" ; he is god of Wisdom and Science, of Writing, Incantations, and Oracles, the special patron of priests.

SIN is the Moon-god, with famous temples in the towns of Ur and Harran. He is one of the most powerful gods of the Babylonian Pantheon. King Nabonid calls him "Prince of the Gods of Heaven and Earth." Beside him stands his son, the Sun-god SHAMASH, god of justice and of oracles, honoured with a special cult at Sippar in Northern, and Larsa in Southern Babylonia. NINURTA (whose name was once read as NINIB), war-god and patron of agriculture, is another solar divinity, as is probably NERGAL, god of war, pestilence and destruction, originally worshipped at Kutha. ADAD (called also RAMMAN) is a storm-god.

Each of these gods had a companion goddess or spouse. But the majority of these goddesses had but a colourless rôle, and were practically merely the "doublet" of the male divinities with whom they were associated. Many of them ended by being identified with Ishtar, which name even became synonymous with "goddess." *Ishtar* occupied an important place side by side with the great gods. She was the feminine principle of fecundity, reproduction, and life, the goddess of sensual love and pleasure. She was also the goddess of battles and of war. At Uruk (Erech), "priestesses and voluntary eunuchs served the goddess. According to the great Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, the plot of which centres, in fact, at Uruk, her town, she has no legitimate spouse, but picks her lovers at her good pleasure." (F. Jerémias).

DUMUZI or TAMMUZ (the *Adonis* of Phœnicia and Greece) is not one of the more important gods, but his cult and legend are famous. He is god of vegetation and spring ; he perishes each year, devoured by the blazing summer sun, in the month which bears his own name, Tammuz. He

is the lover of Ishtar, and when he descends into the lower world, Ishtar follows him to snatch her beloved from death : this is the subject of the poem *The Descent of Ishtar into Hell*.

The gods were grouped in two main categories, according as they were celestial or terrestrial ; they were called the IGIGI and the ANUNNAKI respectively.

Assyria borrowed her religious ideas and divinities from Babylon. Its own national deity, ASSHÛR, was at first merely a local god, who was elevated to the first rank when Assyria became a powerful kingdom. He was particularly the god of war. His spouse, NINLIL, was the Assyrian Ishtar, and the goddess of battles, invoked as " Ishtar of Nineveh or Arbeles," the two Assyrian towns where she had her chief sanctuaries.

Many authors have asserted that, by the time of Hammurabi (about 2000 B.C.), Babylonia had reached a certain monotheism. Proper names of persons, dating from this period, are found compounded with the name of God (*ilu*), thus : *Ilu-ittia*, " God with me " ; *Ilu-abi*, " God is my Father " ; *Avêl-ilu*, " Servant of God," etc. So, too, in the code of Hammurabi, discovered by M. de Morgan, 1901-02, and deciphered by Fr. V. Scheil, O.P., it is frequently laid down that the guilty or accused person be brought " before God," without a name of any particular deity being added. Must we not then conclude that the Babylonians were thinking of a supreme god, unique perhaps, the Only True God? No : that is not at all what the examples we have quoted, or any analogous to them, prove ; for we can—and most probably ought to translate, " *a god is with me*," " *a god is my father*," etc. ; or, better still, " *the god*," i.e., *the god I invoke, the principal protector of town, family, or individual*. This is the opinion of an expert who has made a special study of personal proper names of Hammurabi's time.<sup>1</sup> The Babylonians thought that each individual was under the protection of a particular deity, " his god " or " his goddess," who kept him from misfortune, and watched over him, as angel guardians watch over us.

<sup>1</sup>Hermann Ranke, *Early Babylonian Proper Names, Hammurabi Dynasty*, 1905, p. 214, n. 3.

We may here repeat what Professor Flinders Petrie said about the religion of ancient Egypt: "The god under whom a man was born and lived, was *the* god to him; and equally it was right in his view for everyone born under other gods to worship them. The common references to 'god' or the 'great god' in religious inscriptions mean naturally the god of the place."<sup>1</sup>

An often-quoted text, much relied upon by those anxious to indicate monotheistic tendencies and currents in Babylonian religion, is the following; it probably dates from the late Babylonian epoch:—

Nergal	is Marduk (as God) of War.
Zababa	is Marduk (as God) of Battle.
Enlil	is Marduk (as God) of Rule and Government.
Nabû	is Marduk (as God) of Wealth.
Sin	is Marduk as Illuminator of the Night.
Shamash	is Marduk (as God) of Justice.
Adad	is Marduk (as God) of Rain.

(Translation by L. W. King).

But analogous lists similarly identify various divinities with Ea, Bel, Ninurta, or Nergal, etc. This suggests a tendency in the various religious centres to simplify the Pantheon, to refer everything to the chief god, to exalt Marduk, Ea, etc., above the other gods, regarding each of these as possessing or reflecting one or the other of his attributes. Besides, we are not exactly sure of the meaning of these speculations: many Assyriologists refuse to see in them an expression of any genuine monotheistic notion. And rightly, for these formulæ are far from the true monotheism which proclaims one only God, and regards *all other gods as nothing*. To the very end, the kings of Babylon and of Nineveh in their inscriptions invoked gods and goddesses. So, too, private persons in their correspondence name as their protectors Asshûr, Belit, Sin, Shamash, Adad, Marduk, Zarpanitum, Nâbû, Tashmetum, Ishtar, Ninurta, Nergal, Laz, etc., the great gods of heaven and earth and the guardian gods of the country. We must conclude, then, with the best Assyriologists and historians of religions, that if Babylon and Assyria did indeed move

<sup>1</sup>*Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions*, vol. i., Oxford, 1908, p. 188.

*towards* monotheism, they never took the final step, and to the end maintained a *monarchical polytheism*. Partisans of natural evolution must, therefore, confess that monotheism was never reached by Babylon and Assyria in a religious history of more than 3,000 years; it would be but good logic to recognize the transcendental character of the monotheistic religion of Israel.

It has been asserted that the name of Yahweh was known to the Babylonians long before the time of Moses. Mr. R. W. Rogers, for instance, writes as follows: "Here, then, is the name Jahweh in use among the Babylonians, at the Hammurabi period, two thousand years before Christ . . . . There can therefore be no escape from the conclusion that the divine name Jahweh is not a peculiar possession of the Hebrews,"<sup>1</sup> Still he recognizes that the idea of the Divinity is incomparably higher among the Israelites: "Jahweh himself is not taken away. He remains the priceless possession, the chief glory of Israel. It is only the *name* that is shown to be widespread. And the *name* matters little . . . . Into that vessel a long line of prophets, from Moses onward, poured such a flood of attributes as never a priest in all Western Asia, from Babylonia to the Sea, ever dreamed of in his highest moments of spiritual insight. In this name, and through Israel's history, God chose to reveal Himself to Israel, and by Israel to the world. Therein lies the supreme and lonesome superiority of Israel over Babylonia."<sup>2</sup>

The presence of the actual name Yahweh in the Babylonian documents, where it is believed to have been found, is very problematical. It may be maintained with many learned Assyriologists (*cf.* Lehmann, Zimmern, Bezold, Hilprecht, Ranke, Daiches, Hehn), that it is not as yet even proved probable.

<sup>1</sup>*The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria, especially in its Relations to Israel*, 1908, pp. 93, 95.

<sup>2</sup>*Ib.* p. 9. These pages on the name of Yahweh were quoted entire in the *Expository Times*, April 1909, pp. 316-319.

## III. COSMOGONY

The ancient cosmogonies tell us naively what a nation thought about its gods and their relations with mankind. According to the Babylonian idea, the gods created mankind with the utilitarian object of making them work for them, and thus enabling themselves to enjoy their repose. The word "cult" (*dulhu*) signifies "service," "work" for the gods (Bruno Meissner). We possess portions of a fairly large number of cuneiform texts on the Creation. The longest is a great epic poem in seven tablets, of which more than 850 lines have been preserved. Here is the beginning of this poem :

When in the height heaven was not named,  
And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name,  
And the primæval Apsû, who begat them,  
And chaos [Mummu], Tiâmat, the mother of them both,  
Their waters were mingled together,  
And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen ;  
When of the gods none had been called into being,  
And none bore a name, and no destinies [were ordained] ;  
Then were created the gods in the midst of [heaven] . . . .  
L. W. King's translation.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning there existed only *Apsû*, the ocean of fresh water, as the masculine principle, and *Tiâmat*, the ocean of salt water, as feminine principle, and these mixed their waters in the chaos. Their son, *Mummu*, is the first to be mentioned. Then were born the gods *Lahmu* and *Lahamu* ; after them came *Anshar* (the upper world) and *Kishar* (the lower world). *Anshar* created the god *Anu*, and *Anu* generated the god *Ea*. Soon *Apsû* complains of the gods, whose activity disturbs his repose :—

"By day I cannot rest, by night I cannot lie down." He consults *Tiâmat*, and together they resolve to destroy the gods. *Tiâmat* gives birth to serpents, dragons, and monsters of all sorts, which she hurls against the gods. The god *Anu* is sent to do battle with her : but at the mere sight of *Tiâmat* he flies in terror. *Marduk* consents to undertake the fight, on condition, though, of being exalted in the assembly of the gods. The gods accordingly meet

<sup>1</sup>*The Seven Tablets of Creation*, London, 1902. A more complete edition of the poem, with Introduction, Transcription, and Commentary, has been given (Oxford, 1923) by S. Langdon, under this title : "*The Babylonian Epic of Creation restored from the recently recovered Tablets of Asshûr*."

at a great banquet, and, in their cups, bestow the omnipotence on Marduk. He arms for the fray :—

The bow and the quiver he hung at his side.

He set the lightning in front of him,

With burning flame he filled his body.

He made a net to enclose the inward parts of Tiāmat,

(or, to enclose Tiāmat therein)

The four winds he stationed so that nothing of her might escape . . . .

Thus equipped, riding on a hurricane for chariot, Marduk advances boldly against Tiāmat. Directly that monster opens her jaws, he hurls a tempestuous wind between them, and pierces her body with an arrow. He divides the body, and with half he covers heaven ; to support the waters aloft, he shoots a bolt and instals a sentinel. Thus is formed a sort of firmament containing the upper waters. Marduk proceeds to set in the sky stars, planets, moon, and sun : the moon he establishes to regulate time. In the remaining fragments of the last tablet, Marduk is seen forming man out of blood—perhaps, according to several authorities, his own blood. The poem ends with the glorification of Marduk by gods and men. Bel gives him his own name of Lord of the World, and fifty titles are bestowed on him for the proclamation of his attributes.

The evident purpose of this poem is to elevate Marduk, god of Babylon, above all other gods. The poem dates from the period when that city rose to the first rank, about 2000 B.C., but the fundamental notion of the poem, the traditions which it makes use of, are presumably far more ancient than this. In other places it is the god Ea who is represented as creator of mankind.

Many writers have insisted on the similarity of this story to that of the Hebrew Genesis. But the dissimilarities are yet more striking, and they are essential and profound. In the mythic poem, the gods are *born* when they emerge from chaos : their life is threatened by the very principle which gave them birth ; they engage in a struggle which might have ended in their destruction. Anu basely flies before the enemy. The gods get drunk and noisy. The “omnipotence” of Marduk seems doubtful enough in view of his way of acquiring it, of the magic proofs he gives of it, of the odd armour he is obliged to don in order to fight Tiāmat ; in fact, the whole scene is grotesque. In the Bible, however, instead of this coarse *polytheism*, we find a pure *monotheism*. A unique God acts from the outset

as absolute master, with genuine omnipotence. He has no need to embark on a perilous conflict with hostile forces; with a single word he creates and organizes all. The spirituality of the ideas, the dignity of the tone, the majesty of the picture, exalt this first page of Genesis incomparably above the Babylonian legend and all the cosmogonies of antiquity.

In the Flood episode (tablet xi. of the Gilgamesh epic) the similarities with the Bible narrative are, in a number of details, far more striking; but here, too, the gods cut a sorry figure:

The gods were afraid of the Flood;  
 They withdrew and ascended the heaven of Anu;  
 The gods, like dogs with drooping ears, crouched behind the  
 barrier . . . .  
 The gods smelt the smell of the sacrifice,  
 The gods smelt the pleasant smell;  
 The gods gathered like flies above the sacrificer.  
 (Lines 114-116, 160-162).

The poem does not make the motive of the deluge plain: the gods dispute about it. Enlil is indignant on beholding that everyone has not perished. Ishtar plays a ridiculous rôle: she had decided on the destruction of humanity, and yet deploras the spectacle of mankind's death by drowning. In the Bible, the Flood is a *punishment of corrupt* humanity: the righteous Noe is spared.

In 1915, Professor Stephen Langdon published a transcription, translation, and interpretation of a Sumerian text which he called "The Sumerian Epic of Paradise, the Flood, and the Fall of Man."<sup>1</sup> But Sumeriologists and Assyriologists in general have not found in its text any trace of Paradise, the Flood, or the Fall of Man. We therefore pass this by.

#### IV. MAGIC, WITCHCRAFT, INCANTATIONS

Sickness and disasters were not regarded as effects of merely natural causes, but as punishments for offences against a god, and were attributed to maleficent demons. Wizards, and especially witches, were very powerful in

<sup>1</sup>University of Pennsylvania, The University Museum; Publications of the Babylonian Section: vol. x., No. 1.



drawing down these evils upon men. They could confound nature, change the destinies of men, influence the decisions of the great gods, impress a whole army of evil genii against a miserable mortal. Charms, magic potions, mysterious operations, or simply the "evil eye," the whispering of a few ill-omened words, sufficed to effect these prodigies. Against this malevolent power exorcist-priests fought by means of incantations. They strove to break the spell, either by turning it back upon the sorceress, or driving out the evil demon by a categorical command—"Go hence!"—or, finally, by addressing prayers to the gods, especially those of Light and Fire. They enumerated the various sins of which the afflicted person might have been guilty, and, next, the different ways of falling under a spell:

Be the spell broken, whatever it be . . .

Whether through his father's image he be bewitched,  
Or through the image of his elder brother or elder sister he be  
bewitched,

Whether he have encountered a man bewitched,  
Or have slept in the bed of a man bewitched,  
Or have sat in the chair of a man bewitched,  
Or have eaten in the plate of a man bewitched,  
Or have drunk in the cup of a man bewitched.

[To conjure the spell, the object by which it has been transmitted must be discovered.]

He hunts, he hunts! He hunts in the bed,  
He hunts in the chair, He hunts in the dish,  
He hunts in the lamp, He hunts in the bellows,  
He hunts in the tablet and the writing-reed . . .  
He hunts at the going out and the coming in of the city,  
He hunts at the exit and at the entering in of the house.<sup>1</sup>

Various series of documents of this sort have been published, showing how large a place witchcraft and conjuration occupied at Babylon. It is vividly described in the 47th chapter of Isaiah. The prophet says to Babylon:

. . . . An evil shall come upon thee, thou shalt not know how to charm it away . . .

Keep then thine enchantments and the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth up!

They perchance shall be of avail for thee; they perchance shall make thee terrible.

<sup>1</sup>H. Zimmern, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion*, 2nd. tablet "Shurpu."

## V. DIVINATION AND ORACLE

The custom of consulting the gods and receiving their oracles witnesses to the belief of the ancients in a Providence who governs the world, knows future events and the resolutions of human wills, hears prayer, and is willing in certain circumstances to reveal His designs. But here too is an essential and fundamental difference between these oracles and the prophecies, containing the true revelations with which God deigned to favour Israel, His elect.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the Hebrews, the office of prophet was the privilege of a very small number of men, chosen and sent directly by God, and not knowing beforehand what they would have to say in His name. Amongst the Babylonians, on the other hand, divination was a well-organised art, learnt and taught, and handed down from father to son. It was the function of the *bârû*, the "scer" or "diviner." Divination had a very large field. The ancient inhabitants of Chaldea thought they could detect throughout the realm of nature mysterious signs by which the divinity communicated to them the knowledge of future things. They called the stars "the writing of the firmament." Colleges of astrologers were instituted in order to study the order and motion of the stars, register the various phases of the eclipses of sun and moon and their exact dates, and to interpret their significance.

With so much observing art thou wearied?

Let them arise, then, let them save thee,

They that make the chart of the heavens,

And that observe the stars,

And tell unto thee each month

Whence the things that are to be shall come!

Isaiah xlvii. 13.

Atmospheric phenomena were also analysed, and due note was taken as to the month in which thunder was heard, how often, and under what circumstances, and also whether it resembled the roaring of a lion, or a bellowing, a bleating, or a barking.

<sup>1</sup> "What prerogative, then, is the Jew's? . . . Much, every way. First, that to them were entrusted the oracles of God." (Rom. iii. 1, 2).

Innumerable indications of the future were likewise furnished by animals. The flight of birds was watched by a special functionary, called "observer of the birds." Attention was also paid to quadrupeds, wild and domestic, such as lions, foxes, gazelles, oxen, sheep, asses, horses, goats, dogs, and pigs; also to reptiles and insects of every kind, such as snakes, salamanders, lizards, chameleons, scorpions, moths, ants . . . . To all this must be added signs presented by springs, rivers, the growth of plants, and the thousand and one events of daily life in town and country, such as the mere meeting of some animal going along a road, appearances of spirits and of ghosts, etc. . . . .

For the declaring of what was foretold by a dream, there were specialists called "interpreters of dreams." A meaning was also sought for the birth of monstrosities, whether real, or imaginary, or altogether chimerical. We possess long lists in which the diviners of Chaldea set forth what will happen if a woman gives birth at one and the same time to two, three, four, and even up to seven or eight children, also if a child is born with two heads, or four hands, or with the head of a lion, or of a dog, a pig, a snake, or a bird! "If a ewe gives birth to a lion with a pig's eye, the princess will die!"<sup>1</sup>

Even all these accidental and unlooked-for forecasts did not suffice. In order to be able to consult the gods whenever one wanted to do so, as for instance before some important enterprise, some manifestation of the divine will was sought in the entrails of sacrificial victims, and particularly by examining the liver, which was regarded by the ancient Semites as the principal organ and the source of life. *Hepatoscopy* (examination of the liver) or *Exstispicine* (examination of the entrails) became a science of the first order. Shamash, the sun-god, was consulted by means of hepatoscopy. A good number of these consultations and replies have been found and published.<sup>2</sup> In the case of an illness of Ashurbanipal, the liver of the

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Ludwig Dennefeld, *Babylonisch-Assyrische Geburts-Omina*, Leipzig, 1914.

<sup>2</sup>Ernst Georg Klauber, *Politisch-Religiöse Texte aus der Sargonidenzeit*, Leipzig, 1913.

animal examined presented five unfavourable signs. If the forecast was unfavourable, the experiment could be repeated up to three times.

Possibly the oracles were often vague, and inspired but little confidence; witness the following message sent to King Esarhaddon by the goddess Ishtar:

The former word  
That I spake unto thee,  
Thou hadst no confidence therein.  
Lo, now!  
In the last words  
Have thou confidence!

Professor Morris Jastrow here observes: "Clearly, the Assyrian kings believed that the oracles existed to announce what they wanted to hear; they probably did not hesitate to follow their own judgment whenever they considered it superior to the advice given to them by the gods."

Several methods of divination could be employed at the same time. The prophet Ezechiel, who, in his exile at Babylon, is a first-hand authority, writes as follows: "The king of Babylon stands at the parting of the two ways to use divination (in order, *scl.*, to decide in which direction to make his expedition): he shakes the arrows, he consults his household gods, he examines the liver."<sup>1</sup>

A very easy method of divination, and one within the reach of all, consisted in pouring a few drops of oil into water, and observing what transpired. The texts concerning this are simple and clear: "If thou consultest oil for a marriage, and if one (drop of oil) is dropped in for the man, and another near to it for the woman, and these two drops approach each other, thou hast an oracle: they will marry. If after these (drops of oil) have approached each other, that of the man divides into two, the man will die; if that of the woman divides into two, the woman will die."

In Israel, instead of rites of divination laid down for general public utility, we find throughout an official condemnation of divination (Deut. xviii. 10-12; *cf.* Lev. xix. 26, 31; xx. 6, 27; I. Sam. xxviii. 3; II. Kings

<sup>1</sup>Ezech, xxi. 21.

xxiii. 24; Isaias xlv. 25, etc.). The prophet of Israel differs absolutely from diviners of every kind: by his supernatural vocation to the service of the true God, by the object of his mission, which has to do with the great religious interests of the people, by his manner of acting, by the moral work which he accomplishes, and by his language, which is simple, firm, and full of authority.

Even in their form, in spite of their similarities, the simplicity of the Bible phrases cannot but be contrasted with the prolix and complicated consultations of the Babylonian priests, who enumerate all possible cases, and multiply synonyms, for fear the god may misunderstand, or rather, lest he elude the question, or give but an evasive answer. Here is an example of an oracle:

"O Shamash, great Lord, to my demand, in thy faithful favour, deign to answer. Between this day, the 3rd day of this month, of the month of Arû, until the 11th day of the month of Abû of this year, within these 100 days and these 100 nights, a space of time fixed (as limit) for the oracle of the bârû; within this fixed space of time will Kashtariti with his troops, or the troops of the Cimmerians, or the troops of the Medes, or the troops of the Manneans, or all other enemy, succeed in their designs? By assault, by force, by arms and battle, by breach, mine, or battering ram, by starvation, by the names of the god and the goddess, by parley and amicable conference, or by any other method or stratagem of siege, shall they take the town of Kishassu? shall they enter the walls of this town of Kishassu? shall they seize this town of Kishassu? shall it fall into their hands? Thy great godhead knoweth it" . . . etc.<sup>1</sup>

## VI. HYMNS, PRAYERS, SACRIFICES

The Babylonians and Assyrians felt profoundly their dependence upon the Divinity; they were essentially religious. To start with, their own names bear witness to their feelings: their names reveal sentiments of confidence, gratitude, and respect for some one or other attribute of the Divinity, or again, a prayer, a benediction: they signify, for instance, *Marduk has given a son; Sin has multiplied the brothers; Sin has heard; Sin has accepted my homage*;

<sup>1</sup>J. A. Knudtzon, *Assyrische Gebete an den Sonnengott . . . aus der Zeit Asarhaddons u. Asurbanipals*, 1893, No. 1. These cunningly-varied formulæ naturally make us think of the words of the gospel: "they think that in their much speaking they shall be heard." (Matt. vi. 7).

*My master has heard me ; Son of Sin ; Son of Ishtar ; Son of his God ; Servant of Ea ; Handmaid of Shamash ; Asshûi is my strength ; Adad is my help ; Bel is good ; Shamash is King ; Who is like to Asshûr ? I shall behold the face of Bel ; Turn thee to Shamash !* These names are found in historical documents or contracts, also in letters, etc. Several thousands of these names are known, and they furnish evidence of high utility for the appreciation of religion.<sup>1</sup>

In the opinion of Professor Stephen Langdon, who has published an important hymn-book of the official religion of Babylonia and Assyria :

"Religious literature in Babylonia originated from two distinct sources ; on the one hand, the priest of incantation exercised the mystic rites of magic over afflicted persons in huts in the fields ; on the other hand, the psalmists had charge of the public services of the temples . . . ."<sup>2</sup>

And elsewhere the same author writes :

"The entire history of Sumerian and Babylonian religion, extending over a period of three thousand years, contains in the public services a dominant note of penance and fear of the gods. Religion is primarily a social expression of humanity, and it is the expression of their helplessness and their sinfulness. This does not imply that the Babylonian view of life was pessimistic. . . . Yet, after all, their public liturgies and psalms leave upon us, as they must have left upon them, an impression of indefinable longing to be more pure."<sup>3</sup>

These sentiments are expressed in songs of lamentation, which bewail public calamities or private misfortunes. Those dealing with the latter have been called "penitential psalms." After an exposition of the misfortunes in question, which are regarded as a sign of the wrath of a god, there follow supplications for deliverance from the evils, in the form of litanies. In 1930, P. Maur Witzel, O.F.M., an Assyriologist and Sumeriologist, published a

<sup>1</sup>Of great value, again, are the names of temples, which reveal the point of view from which the god and his sanctuary were considered. The late Prof. D. D. Luckenbill has drawn up a list of over 300 Babylonian and Assyrian temple names (see *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, July 1908).

<sup>2</sup>*Sumerian and Babylonian Psalms*, Paris, 1909, p. vii.

<sup>3</sup>*Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions*, Oxford, 1908, i., p. 249.

translation of six Sumerian compositions from the liturgy of King Ishme-Dagan (First Dynasty of Isin, about 2100 B.C.) The first of these is a long chant of lamentation over the ruin of the temple, the city, and the people. But the god Enlil, moved by compassion, will send the goddess Ishtar to succour the afflicted; he will make use of Ishme-Dagan to defeat their enemies and repair all the evil done. Here are a few lines of this chant:

. . . . in the ruined dwelling place the Anunnaki [gods of the earth] are beaten down; in the hall of the assembly, where the great judgment takes place, they no longer pronounce just decisions.

As for the gods who are (still) in their place, their sacred food slips to the ground, their crown is thrown down on the earth. . . . in the great sanctuary of the pure feast, the offerings of wine and sweet libations are lost.

At Nippur, the town the shadow of which, stretching afar, served as a refuge for the people with black heads, the inhabitants are swept from their dwellings as if by the waters; they are scattered as a herd of oxen is scattered.

The interior of the town is filled with bitter laments; the spouse of the sovereign, the goddess his consort, no longer cares for him. Into the great temple, which now knows only lamentations, as into the midst of ruins, no one enters . . . .<sup>1</sup>

The following hymn to Ishtar is no less remarkable (translated by L. W. King):

I pray unto thee, Lady of ladies, Goddess of goddesses!

O Ishtar, queen of all peoples, directress of mankind!

O Irnini, thou art raised on high, mistress of the Spirits of heaven

Thou art mighty, thou hast sovereign power, exalted is thy name!

Thou art the light of heaven and earth, O valiant daughter of the Moon-god.

Ruler of weapons, arbitress of the battle!

Framer of all decrees, wearer of the crown of dominion!

O Lady, majestic is thy rank, over all the gods is it exalted! . . . .

Where thou lookest in pity, the dead man lives again, the sick is healed;

The afflicted is saved from his affliction, when he beholdeth thy face!

I, thy servant, sorrowful, sighing, and in distress cry unto thee.

Look upon me, O my lady, and accept my supplication,

Truly pity me, and hearken unto my prayer!

Cry unto me "It is enough!" and let thy spirit be appeased!

How long shall my body lament, which is full of restlessness and confusion?

How long shall my heart be afflicted, which is full of sorrow and sighing?

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<sup>1</sup>*Perlen Sumerischer Poesie, Dritte Folge*; 1930, p. 19.

It would be hard to find, in Babylonian literature, many religious hymns entirely devoted to celebrating the glory of the gods, to the expression of admiration, gratitude, love, and confidence, without some mention at least of the interests of their pious clients. The hymns usually begin with magnificent praises of the Divinity : they celebrate his attributes in terms of high rhetoric and often sublime poetry : they regularly end with a petition. One feels that the main, if not the unique, preoccupation, is to win the goodwill of the gods so as to appease them, to obtain their good graces, to get a favourable answer to a request. Professor Jastrow assures us that Babylonians and Assyrians alike only turned to the gods when they wanted to obtain something—patronage or cure, deliverance from ill, or favour. The pure praise of the gods without secondary preoccupations does not exist in the Assyro-Babylonian cultus.

Yet *prayer* was frequent among them. Their language has a score of synonyms of the word "prayer." "I pray daily" is a formula constantly recurring in their correspondence. No doubt the ordinary salutation is "Good state of heart and good state of body," *i.e.*, "Happiness and health!" but it is already much to recognize man's dependence therein upon the Divine Being.

A son writes to his father : "Every day I pray to Nabu and Nanâ for the life of my father ; and for the intention of my father I offer homage to Ezida [temple of Nabu at Borsippa]. An official writes to the king's mother : "May Bel and Nabu bless the king's mother, my sovereign lady. Every day I pray Nabu and Nanâ to grant life and long days to the king of the lands, my sovereign, and to the mother of the king, my sovereign lady. By the favour of the gods I am well, and all those who are with me . . . Pray to Bel and Belit for me." And again we read : "By the grace of the gods I am well : if I pray to the gods, I obtain my desire."

As the gods were pictured after the manner of mankind, it was thought that, like men, they need food, drink, and clothing. From this arose in the first place the idea that *presents* and *sacrifices* ought to be offered to them (Br. Meissner, ii. p. 82). This is exactly the opposite of the doctrine expressed in the Hebrew psalm 50



(Vulgate 49). In addition, it was hoped by such offerings to gain the favour of the gods, appease their wrath, and compensate them for the offences committed. But the guilty persons themselves were not sacrificed—it has not been proved that the Babylonians and Assyrians practised human sacrifice. In the place of the guilty persons, animals were immolated, such as sheep, goats, oxen, pigs, or birds. The fruits of the earth were also offered. In addition to the regular and daily sacrifices, kings and ordinary citizens offered special presents in the temples on various occasions.

The *festivals* in honour of the various divinities were regulated down to the smallest details by rituals.<sup>1</sup> The rites of the feasts remained essentially the same during thousands of years, undergoing modifications in detail but remaining without any fundamental change.

There were very numerous priests specially allocated to the various functions of worship; space is lacking here to give a list of these.

## VII. IDEA OF SIN. MORAL SYSTEM

To enter into the Babylonian conscience, we must cite a rather long text taken from an incantation where, in order to get rid of an evil, an attempt is made to discover what was the sin which caused that evil.

[I invoke you, great gods,] [. . . god and] goddess, lords of deliverance,

[For N., the son of] N., Whose god is N., whose goddess N., Who is ill, sad, anxious, afflicted. Has he offended his god? his goddess?

Has he given a refusal instead of a promise, Or a promise for a refusal?

Has he separated son from father? Has he separated father from son?

[And so on through several relationships].

Has he refused to release a captive? To deliver a prisoner?

Has he sinned against no god? Has he offended no goddess? . . .

Has he afflicted a god? Has he scorned a goddess?

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<sup>1</sup>François Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels Accadiens*, 1921.

Violence against his grand-father ? Hatred for his elder brother ?  
 Has he scorned father and mother ? Offended his elder sister ?  
 Given but little ? Refused much ?  
 Said Yea for Nay ? And Nay for Yea ?  
 Has he weighed with false weights ? . . . .  
 Has he used false money ? Not used good money ?  
 Has he disinherited a legitimate son, Established a bastard ?  
 Has he traced false boundaries, Not traced true boundaries ? . . . .  
 Has he entered his neighbour's house ? Approached his neighbour's  
 wife ?  
 Has he spilt his neighbour's blood ? Stolen his neighbour's coat ?  
 Has he risen up against a superior ?  
 Has he had frankness in his mouth and falseness in his heart ? . . . .  
 Has he taught dark things, and revealed what should be hid ? . . . .  
 Has he steeped his hands in magic and sorcery ?  
 Is it for a grave sin that he shall have committed ?  
 For a company that he shall have scattered ?  
 For a united family that he shall have disunited ?  
 Is it for all the slights he may have put upon his god and goddess ?  
 Shall he have promised in heart and word and broken his  
 promise ? . . . .  
 Shall he have withheld what he had consecrated ?<sup>1</sup>

The moral sense, then, of these pagans was not wholly perverted ; indeed in some points they manifest a certain delicacy of conscience. Yet, in spite of the assertions of Friedrich Delitzsch, the Babylonians and Assyrians were far from having as profound a conception of the nature of sin as what we find among the Israelites. "The grace of the merciful god," F. Jeremias justly notes, "the result sought and hoped for through prayer, is but deliverance from sickness. That is the meaning of *remission of sins*. Forgiveness and cure are synonyms. This must be our starting-point would we estimate their notions of fault and sin, of mercy and of pardon."

A learned Assyriologist and religious historian, Tiele gave a like verdict : "Babylon and Assyria had not yet achieved a clear distinction between sin and the results of sin." They felt that the ill from which they were suffering was the chastisement of some fault ; and they regretted the fault as being the cause of their own ill ; they humbled themselves to appease the angered god ; it was a servile

<sup>1</sup>H. Zimmern, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Babylonischen Religion*, 2nd tablet "Shurpu."

fear. Yet their regrets and supplication are expressed in words of tender pathos :

The faults I have committed, I know them not . . . .  
 The Lord hath looked on me in the anger of his heart,  
 The god in the fury of his heart hath visited me . . . .  
 I seek [for help] ; none stretcheth out his hand to me ;  
 I weep, and lo, there is none beside me.  
 I cry, and none heareth me.  
 Sad, prostrate on the earth, lifting not mine eyes,  
 To my merciful god I direct my lamentation.

The suppliant does not always know what deity he has offended; and for fear of omitting precisely this offended god in his invocation, he implores the "unknown god," the "unknown goddess" (*cf.* Acts 17, 23).

One document, from the library of Asshurbanipal, is of such high significance, both because of its intrinsic beauty and because of the illegitimate comparisons which have been made between it and Isaiah's description of the suffering Servant of Yahweh, that we must translate a considerable portion of it :

I. (*My ill resists all remedies.*)

I came to life, I advanced in age,  
 in vain I turned this way or that, it was evil, evil ;  
 suffering was supreme, I saw no good.  
 I invoked my god, he hid his face from me ;  
 I prayed to my goddess, she lifted not her head.  
 The seer by his visions revealed not to me the future ;  
 by a sacrifice the priest established not my right.  
 I evoked the dead : they taught me nothing ;  
 the wizard with his rites took not off from me my lot. . . .

II. (*I seemed afflicted like a sinful man.*)

As though an offering to the god I had not offered,  
 nor over the (sacred) food invoked my goddess,  
 humiliated my face, known prostration !  
 Such is he, whose mouth is shut to supplications, to prayers,  
 who neglects the day of the god and forgets the new moon, etc.

III. (*Yet was I always faithful to gods and king.*)

As for me, I busied myself with supplications, with prayers ;  
 prayer was my care and sacrifice my law ;  
 The day of the worship of the god made the joy of my heart ;  
 the day of my goddess, my goods and my riches.  
 The homages paid to the King were my happiness,  
 his joyous feast a pleasure for me.

I have taught in my country to revere the name of the god ;  
to honour the name of the goddess I have instructed my people.  
The majesty of the King have I made equal to a god's ;  
to the people have I taught the fear of the palace :  
I know that unto God that is well-pleasing.

IV. (*The designs of the gods are obscure.*)

What is good in itself for the god is an evil ;  
what is in itself vile in the eyes of the god, it is good !  
Who knoweth the will of the gods who are in heaven ?  
The dark divine design O who can grasp it ?  
How should weak mortals be instructed in the ways of a god ?  
Man that liveth in the evening in the morning is dead ;  
swiftly is he smitten down suddenly is he broken.  
For an instant he singeth unto music ;  
and the moment after he sigheth like a mourner.  
As from white to black his heart changeth.  
When he is an-hungred one would say " A corpse ! "  
When he is filled he maketh himself equal to his god.  
In his well-being he saith " I shall ascend to heaven ! "  
In his pain he deemeth to go down to hell . . .

Now, be this sufferer king, or governor (which is more likely), the fact remains that the notion *essentially* characteristic of the suffering Servant of Yahweh—that he is suffering and dying for the crimes of his brethren—is wholly lacking in his lamentation. The resemblance is rather to the complaints of Job.

The following text recalls the aphorisms of the Book of Proverbs.<sup>1</sup> :

Like a man wise and modest, thou oughtest to humble (?) thy mind.  
Let thy mouth be discreet, let thy word be circumspect ! . . .  
To thine adversary do nothing evil !  
To him who doeth thee evil, render good !<sup>2</sup>  
To thine enemy deal justice . . .

(There follows counsel not to marry a prostitute.)  
Do not calumniate, talk of that which is good !  
Speak not evil, speak the good !  
He who calumniates, who speaketh evil,  
Shamash, to punish him, will demand his head.  
Open not thy mouth, watch thy lips !  
Thine inmost words do not pronounce too soon (?)

<sup>1</sup>According to Bruno Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, vol. ii., 1925, p. 421, 422, whose translation is to be preferred to that of Stephen Langdon, in *Babylonian Wisdom*, 1923, p. 89-92.

<sup>2</sup>Text a little obscure, but the meaning is most probably that given here.

If thou speakest quickly now, later thou wilt retract ;  
 To learn how to keep silent apply thy mind.  
 Every day, offer in homage to thy god  
 Sacrifice, prayer, and incense as is fitting !  
 Towards thy god, let thy heart be well disposed  
 That is fitting with regard to him.  
 Prayer, supplication, and prostration  
 Thou must give him each day.  
 Then shall thy power be strengthened,  
 And with thy god thou shalt reach the summit of prosperity.  
 For thine instruction look at the tablet.  
 The fear of god leads to well being ;  
 Sacrifice lengthens life,  
 And prayer loosens sins.  
 Him who fears the gods, [his god] does not despise.  
 He who fears the Anunnaki lengthens [his days].  
 With a friend and a companion say nothing [evil] ;  
 Say nothing vile, [say] that which is good.

Unfortunately, we do not know the date of this composition. Maxims of so elevated a morality are very rare in pagan antiquity, and those just quoted are in striking contrast to the actual conduct of the people : murder, theft, fraud, sacred prostitution, the worst immorality, and all the vices are witnessed to by incontestable documents. Impiety, scepticism, and disregard of every moral law is evident in many compositions, as for instance in the dialogue between an irresolute master and his sceptical slave.<sup>1</sup>

The Code of Hammurabi (*cf.* pp. 4-5) is a code of civil and criminal law : it does not call for submission for religious motives. Nevertheless *oaths* therein play an important part in the confirming of various juridical acts. According to this code, *marriage* is a contract, which ought to be drawn up in a proper document under pain of nullity. Marriage is monogamous, not strictly, but in principle and as a general rule. The law determines in what cases and under what conditions the husband can have a concubine. This is allowed, for instance, if his spouse cannot bear him any children. Amongst

<sup>1</sup>Translated into German, in 1919, by Erich Ebeling, in *Quellen zur Kenntnis der Babylonischen Religion*, ii. p. 54-60 ; in French, almost completely, by Albert Condamin, in *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 1921, pp. 135-138 ; in English, in 1923, by S. Langdon, *Babylonian Wisdom*, pp. 69-80.

the Hebrews, bigamy was permitted, but it was not the ideal, nor the ordinary usage: the prophets regarded the nation of Israel as the *spouse of Yahweh*; thus they looked upon monogamy as the normal and perfect type of conjugal union. The right of repudiation is limited in the Code of Hammurabi; here and there some motives for divorce are indicated: sterility in the wife, or her misconduct. The husband has not the right to repudiate his wife in the case of malady: he must keep her with him and look after her, but he can also take to himself another. The wife, for her own part, can also divorce her husband if she is notably neglected by him. Adultery is punished by death. In the case of several crimes, or for purely accidental losses, the *lex talionis* is pushed to extreme exaggerations and given absurd applications.

In Assyria, in the twelfth century before Christ,<sup>1</sup> the punishments were still more rigorous; the death penalty was frequent; other punishments consisted of bodily mutilations, such as the cutting off of the nose or ears. In the case of the seduction of a virgin, the *lex talionis* was applied to the guilty party in a barbarous and insensate way: if he was married, his wife was to be delivered up to a brothel . . . . A regulation, without any parallel in the Code of Hammurabi, determined which women ought to wear veils on their heads in the street. Married ladies had to be veiled, but the veil was forbidden under most severe penalties to the unmarried hierodules (sacred prostitutes), ordinary prostitutes, and servants. If a servant was found veiled, she was to be taken to the palace and her ears cut off. A veiled prostitute would receive fifty blows with the rod, and bitumen was to be poured on to her head. Offences against morals were severely repressed, but inasmuch as legislation corresponds to the state of society, it would seem that this fierce and warlike Assyrian nation, in which a special law was required to punish unnatural offences, was more corrupt than its southern rival, the friend of arts and of peace.

<sup>1</sup>According to the texts deciphered by P. V. Sheil, *Recueil de Lois Assyriennes*, 1921.

## VIII. THE FUTURE LIFE : THE HOME OF THE DEAD

In spite of the misfortunes which the inhabitant of Babylonia was led to fear through the wrath of offended deities, demons, sorcerers, and evil omens, he nevertheless cherished the hope of a long life in this world, for his conception of the future life was a very unattractive one. Paul Dhorme, basing himself upon various data, thus describes the place of the dead :

Hades is called *kigallu*, "the vast land," or often "the land" for short. Its queen is known, *Ereshkigal*, "Lady of the Vast Land," and its king, *Nergal*. For Hades is regarded as an autonomous kingdom with laws of its own . . . . No hope of ever leaving it ; it is "the land without return . . . the house whence he that enters goes out no more . . ." A sevenfold barrier guarantees the security of the kingdom of the dead. The condition of the shades is not cheerful. They are in thickest obscurity, whence the name, *House of Darkness*. For food they have dust and mire. They are depicted with wings like vampires. They come to torment the living, and many an incantation is framed to drive them off. They especially are to be pitied "whose shade had none that concerned himself with it . . ." The shade impatiently awaits the burying of the corpse. As long as the body lies in the fields, the shade has no rest. A better fate awaits those who fell on the field of battle. A whole category of the dead have beds in which to rest and pure water to quench their thirst.<sup>1</sup>

We may add a few words of Prof. Jastrow on this topic :

"Only occasionally do we find the expression of a faint belief that all is not dark and gloomy for the dead, that at least some favoured individuals enjoy a better fortune. At one time the view appears to have been held that the kings after their death were accorded a place among the gods. Statues of the rulers were placed in the temples and accorded divine honours, and even temples were erected bearing their names. But though this view may have had a strong hold upon the masses at one time, in connection with the belief that the rulers, as standing close to the gods, were in some way descended from them, it soon lost its hold, and we learn little about it after the days of Hammurabi."

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<sup>1</sup>*Choix de textes assyrio-babyloniens*, pp. xxxiii.-xxxiv.

As to the different fate of the good and the bad after death, nothing equals in importance a Sumerian text, rather misunderstood by its first editor in 1919. The recent translations by two eminent Sumeriologists, Witzel<sup>1</sup> and Ebeling<sup>2</sup> agree in substance so far as the present subject is concerned. In a first passage, the reference is to a judgment of the dead, *i.e.*, the just and the wicked gathered together in Hades. The just enjoy their rest (?); the wicked are cast into the deep abyss. At the end of this piece, the goddess Nungalla, daughter of Ereshkigal and queen of the dead, declares :

"I have in my hand the breath of life ; the good man shall enjoy (or, according to Ebeling : let the just man remain firm) ; the wicked shall not escape from my power."

## IX. BABYLON AND ISRAEL<sup>3</sup>

1. The history of Israel has, in its main lines, been remarkably confirmed by the discoveries of Assyriology. Radical criticism may have suffered from the witness of the monuments ; truly scientific criticism has but ground to congratulate herself. Old Testament History, instead of appearing isolated, hung as it were between earth and sky, has come into contact with that of neighbouring peoples. It has lost nothing. Much light has been thrown on its human side ; its divine character has been shown in high relief : it remains *Sacred History*.

No point of doctrine contained in the inspired volume has been lost by abandoning a system of chronology, founded on a mistaken interpretation of the Bible text, for the surer and more homogeneous dates of Assyrian chronology.

In the immense Babylonian literature—the small *published* fraction is already incomparably greater than

<sup>1</sup>*Perlen Sumerischer Poesie*, 1929, pp. 105–117.

<sup>2</sup>*Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier*, von Erich Ebeling, Berlin, 1931.

<sup>3</sup>*Cf.* "Babylone et la Bible," by A. Condamin, S.J., *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi catholique*, Paris.



the whole of Hebrew literature—one point calls for attention: the *anonymity* of the authors. The name of no single author survives. Instead of this, the scribes usually add their own name and degree at the foot of the text they have copied. This helps us to understand how a certain number of the books of the Bible (most, in fact, except the prophets) have come down to us without their author's name. Among the Semites and in old times men were far from having our modern ideas on literary appropriation!

2. We must say a word upon the Comparative History of Religions, so much misused to-day.

Many an author adopts the converse of the argument of Clement of Alexandria, with no more critical spirit and with as little success. The learned Clement and some of his contemporaries thought poets and philosophers had plundered the sacred books of the Hebrews. To prove the theft, it sufficed that two authors should say more or less the same thing on any subject you please, *e.g.*, that wine drunk in moderation is useful, and harmful if taken in excess. "In the Comparative History of Religions," says Mr. A. Lods, "to confine one's self to noting similarities is labour lost . . . we must establish *interconnection*."

It is indeed rare that any similarity be so typical that *by itself* it proves that one of the two similars is derived from the other. Human nature is essentially the same at all times and in all lands, with its faculties, its needs, tendencies, frailty, and misery. Hundreds of religious practices are but what is conformable to the construction of human nature. It is puerile to feel surprise, in matter of this sort, at similarities, eagerly to note them down as discoveries, to let the eye be caught by some external features of resemblance and forthwith detect *imitation*. To return to the hymn to Ishtar quoted above, we can easily understand that the sentiments of tender confidence, expressed by a Christian in his prayers to Mary, can, without being an echo, give forth the same sound as the cries of the grief-stricken Babylonian invoking his merciful goddess. The latter recites "a prayer of lifting

up of 'hands'; the former naturally uplifts his hands to implore succour from on high. The Babylonian copyist says at the end that he has written this poem "for [the preservation of] his life." Many a mediæval scribe has spontaneously used similar formulæ.

3. We must, further, remember that Israel, Babylon, and Assyria were of a common stock. This or that Mosaic prescription, instead of being directly connected with the Hammurabic code, may often merely preserve a very ancient custom. A common origin, an identical cast of mind, and sisterhood of dialect explain many an expression, simile, metaphor, and style of versification.

However, from the strong influence undoubtedly exercised by the races of the Euphrates on Hebraic *material* civilization—the Hebrews' division of time, their weights and measures, were probably thus borrowed—we may not conclude at once to a parallel influence in *religious* life. Even under apostate kings, Achaz especially and Manasseh, invading superstition was always vigorously resisted by the prophets.

4. Once, however, any *real link*, a *real interconnection* between doctrines, has been established by the rigorous method proposed with so much tact and science by Fr. Delchaye in a chapter<sup>1</sup> on "Pagan Reminiscences and Survivals in Christian Worship," the Catholic position will have no difficulty in admitting it.

That "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts vii. 22), was, we may surmise, providential, and that he might learn something from it. The Fathers of the Church, accordingly, never hesitated to recognize foreign importations in the Israelite cult. Fr. F. Prat, S.J., cites Chrysostom, Origen, Jerome, Eusebius, and Theodoret to this effect, and, in conclusion, the great commentator Tostat, who writes: "Many a ceremony was common to Jew and pagan: indeed, they were only accorded to the Jews *because* prevalent among the Gentiles. The Jews had become accustomed

<sup>1</sup>*The Legends of the Saints*, c. vi. (Westminster Series).

to them : God tolerated them after effacing all relics of superstition."<sup>1</sup>

5. Yet, in conclusion, we confess that for one who will not admit the *supernatural* character of Old Testament religion, all *essential* difference between it and its neighbours must disappear. Even for those rationalist historians who acknowledge the superiority of the Israelites in religious matters, and recognize in them the only strictly monotheistic people of antiquity, this phenomenon is but an affair of peculiar genius, of especially happy evolution in suitable circumstances. It is Supernatural Revelation, and it alone, that cleaves the abyss between Hebrew and all else. Illuminated by that divine intercourse, the prophets kept away from Yahweh's religion all the magic and superstition, the disgraceful practices and ritual murders held in honour by their neighbours ; they preserved monotheism intact ; they constantly developed and exalted it. We have here no difference merely of degree, to be diminished and perhaps annulled by new discoveries ; but a difference of order, or true Transcendence, which comes from this fact, that the religion of Israel is *revealed*, and *supernatural*.

In the eyes of certain ill-advised apologists, this transcendence of the true religion is transformed into an *absolute and complete opposition* of the divine to erroneous cults. Abbé de Broglie has shown the deplorable results of such an apologetic. We have seen that in Babylonian literature, which represents the religious thought of so many generations, not all is moral perversion and superstition : far from it. We may, without fear, admire its multitude of sublime ideas clad in a vesture of splendid poetry. Through the tangle of polytheistic and mythical imaginings is descried a God who is Creator and Governor of the universe, who punishes and pardons sins, with whom man enters into communication by prayer. The obligation of the moral law, the sense of guilt from sin committed, the inevitable retribution, are affirmed in a multitude of texts. By the side of truths perceived by the natural powers of reason, some faint traces of

<sup>1</sup>*Le Code du Sinaï, sa genèse et son évolution*, 1904, pp. 17, 18.

primitive revelation may have subsisted through the centuries. And God, when He gave to the elect people the privilege of Revelation, did not leave the other peoples altogether without light or help ; He could not indeed exclude them from His providence in the natural order ; He did not will to refuse to them absolutely and wholly, pagans as they were, that supernatural grace which should help them to live well and reach their supreme end.

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# THE RELIGION OF ANCIENT PERSIA

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## I. THE SOURCES

OUR sources for obtaining information about the old religion of Iran are of three very different kinds. First, we have evidence from Greek or Roman writers, the most important and the most original being the account of Herodotus. Then we are in possession of a certain number of inscriptions in the old Persian language, written at the order of the Achaemenid kings. Last, but not least, there is at our disposal the sacred book of the Zoroastrians, the so-called Zend-Avesta, in the Avestic language, completed by the Zoroastrian literature in the Pahlavi or Middle-Persian dialect, consisting of translations or commentaries on the Avesta and in ethical or religious books of various kinds.

Now not only the languages, but the data which we find in these three categories of sources are fairly different.

1. The passage of Herodotus (i. 131ff.) is a precious description of the nature worship which, on many grounds, we assume to have been the type of religion prevalent among Indo-Europeans in the oldest period. The Greek historian tells us that the Persians did not give any human shape to their deities. They called "Zeus" the whole vault of the sky, and they offered to the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, the Fire, the Water, and the Winds. They made their offerings on the summits of the mountains, without making use of the fire. They laid the flesh of the victim, cut in small pieces, on fine grass. For this ceremony, the presence of a Magian was necessary, who read a "cosmogony."

There can be no question of rejecting such an account, because it bears much resemblance to the worship of the Indo-Iranians in Vedic times. But the presence of the Magian is specifically Iranian, and so is the reading of a cosmogony. We may say the same regarding a few items which Herodotus adds to his description : the Persians avoid the soiling of water by contact with anything which comes from the human body and, moreover, the Magians "who differ much from other people" expose their dead bodies in order to have them devoured by the vultures ; they make a point of destroying all impure animals, while, on the contrary, they show much respect for pure beings and especially for the dog.

These last details introduce us to a highly typical Iranian atmosphere, as we know it in later times. In fact, it is almost specifically Zoroastrian or, at least, Magian, because, even in the reports of Herodotus, it appears that in his time one drew a line between Persian beliefs in general and Magian usages. One also gets the impression that the Magian and their lore were then gradually extending their influence over Iranian worship.

2. The second kind of documents, *i.e.*, the inscriptions on rocks, left by Achaemenid kings, present to us another type of religion, more coherent and with a higher character. As one knows, the inscriptions in question were written from 558 B.C. to 330 B.C., *i.e.*, during the reign of the "Great Kings," but few of them are anterior to the times of Darius. Thanks to the English officer Rawlinson, who copied accurately those texts in cuneiform writing, and to the German scholar Grotefend, those inscriptions were made known to us in the nineteenth century. Their text has been published, commented, and revised many times since. The information of a religious or moral character provided by these documents is not very extensive, but suffices to give us an idea of the kind of faith which animated the rulers of the great Persian Empire. The kings present themselves explicitly as the adorers of *Ahuramazda*, which is also the name of God in Zoroastrianism (*Mazdâh Ahura*), while the words of Herodotus, who says that the god of the sky and supreme deity in Persian

is called *Zeus*, might rather incline us to believe that he heard him being named *Dyáus pítar*, as in Ancient India.

But the generic name to signify "God" was *baga*, alike in Iranian, Phrygian, and Slavonic languages (Russ. *Bog*). Auramazda is "the great God" (*baga vazraka*), the greatest of gods (*mathishta bagánám*). He is presented as powerful by his will. It is by his will that the kings are allowed to reign and to conquer (*vashná Auramazdáha adam Khsháyathiya*).<sup>1</sup> "It is by the will of A. that I am King." He sees everything, he is creator of heaven, earth, man, and happiness. He is the protector of the king and his people, and a dreadful antagonist to the unbelievers or to the enemies of Persia. He has laid down rules (*framánd*) for men who "follow the right path" (*pathim rástám*).<sup>2</sup> The worst sin is lying and treachery (*drauga*). The position of Ahuramazda is transcendent, high above the "other gods" (*aniyá bagáha*), or "tribal gods" (*vithibish bagaibish*). Among those, however, special reverence is due to Mithra and Anâhata. The former is known to have been extensively worshipped in Persia as the god of oaths, rectitude, and military honour. It is known that, in Roman times, he became the centre of an interesting religion with mysteries and initiations. Anâhata, named *Anâhita* by Zoroastrians, was a goddess of waters, purity, and fecundity. Notwithstanding their high position, they were treated as mere *baga's* ("helpful, divine beings"), while Ahuramazda was supreme.

One cannot resist the impression that such a religious and ethical complex was not only of a much more exalted character than Indo-Iranian beliefs, but that it had undergone the influence of a certain systematization. However, discussions among scholars are still going on concerning the kind of dependence of this creed upon the genuine Zoroastrian lore, an account of which we are about to present. Despite many points of resemblance, such as pre-eminence of the supreme god and his name, his beneficent influence on the good creation and on the people who follow the good path, his opposition to the Spirit of

<sup>1</sup>Dar. Bh. col. 1, § 5, 6, etc.

<sup>2</sup>Dar. N.R.A. § 6.



Lying and his followers, there are also some marked differences: the comparatively too high position of some secondary gods, the absence of the truly Magian practices: laying down of corpses on *dakhmas*, reading of sacred texts, fire worship, etc. Everything, however, points to a strong influence of Zoroastrian ideas on this Achaemenid creed, although a greater purity of the prophet's teaching was apparently preserved among the Magians.

3. This brings us to the consideration of the sources that disclose the true nature of the Zoroastrian creed, which is the most exalted and most interesting contribution of Iran to the development of religious and ethical ideas.

As secondary sources we have allusions to Zoroaster and to the Magians in Greek and Latin writings. The most important of those passages will be found in the Appendix to A. V. Williams Jackson's *Zoroaster, the Prophet of Ancient Iran* (1899), and in C. Clemen's *Die Griechischen u. Lateinischen Nachrichten über die Persische Religion* (1920).

Most frequently quoted are the *First Alcibiades* of the Pseudo-Plato (121E-122A), and the scholia upon it; the *Natural History* of Pliny (23-79 A.D.), vii. 15, xxx. 2, 1, etc.; and the *Isis and Osiris* of the pious old priest Plutarch (c. 80 A.D.). Had we, however, only sources such as these for our reconstruction of the personality of the Prophet of Iran, and of the characteristics of Zoroastrianism, we should form of them an idea not only inadequate, but altogether false.

In reality the religion of Zoroaster can only be studied in the *Avesta* itself, and in the vast literature of commentaries and religious writings to which the *Avesta* later on gave birth in Persia itself.

A. THE AVESTA.—By this name (*Avesta*=Pahlavi,<sup>1</sup> *apastāk*, a term of doubtful etymology) is designated all that remains to us of an immense religious literature composed in an Iranian dialect generally known as *Zend*. This term is incorrect; for in Pahlavi, *zand* means commentary; *Apastāk va Zand* means the *Avesta* and its Commentary. It is to the first translator of the *Avesta*,

<sup>1</sup>Cf. p. 7.

Anquetil Duperron (1771), that this confusion must be attributed. He made the Pahlavi expression into the word *Zendavesta*, in the belief that the term *zend* referred to the language. The idiom in which the Avesta is written is far best denoted simply as *Avestic*, for thus no premature definition is suggested.<sup>1</sup>

The Avestic idiom is closely allied to the Old Persian of the Achaemenid inscriptions, though markedly divergent from it in certain points, as of phonetic, so of vocabulary. The two dialects present analogous features in the progressive modification of the *Aryan* tongue. The Aryans were ancestors alike of the Persians and of the Indians, and belong to the Indo-European group like Greeks, Germans, Slavs, etc. Their tongue survives with least deterioration in Sanskrit. It is of importance, however, to notice that, within the Avestic literature itself, slight differences are discernible between the dialect of the *gâthâs* on the one hand (*infr.* and p. 11), and that of the rest of the Avesta (Younger-Avesta).

Such portions of the Avesta as have come down to us have survived because of their continued use in the Persian Liturgy. They are hymns; rubrics regulating sacrifice; solemn prayers to the various *Yazatas* (p. 17); codices of ceremonies and rules to be observed at ritual purifications; or formulæ of prayers to be used at the bedside of dying persons.

Professor Geldner, who has collated a very great number of manuscripts, has published the extant Avesta in a large volume of 650 pages in folio (with variants). This is the latest and best edition. It includes:

1. The *Yasna* (properly=sacrifice. Cf. Skt. *yajña*), recited in honour of all the divinities, in particular at the sacrifice of the *haōma* and of the *myazda* (cf. p. 23). This is divided into 72 *hās*, which include, first, texts referring directly to the sacrifices, and, secondly, the hymns known as *gâthâs*, which have a more archaic flavour than the

<sup>1</sup>Exactly in this way, older grammarians, before the Greek in which the New Testament was written began to take its place in the general development of the Greek language, used to call it simply "New Testament Greek."

other parts of the Avesta, both linguistically, and from the character of the ideas they express. They profess to be the actual words of Zoroaster. The religious notions here expressed form a fairly definite religious system. Among them is included the *haptanghāiti*, generally considered to be of more recent date, and consisting of seven hymns addressed to Ahura Mazdāh, to the Ameshas-Spentas, to the Fravashis of the righteous, to Fire, to the Waters, and to the Earth (*cf.* p. 18 *seqq.*). The Yasna contains, finally, certain specially holy prayers, such as the *Ahuna Vairya*, the *Ashem Vohu*, etc.

2. The *Vispered* (Avestic, *vispe ratavō*, "all the masters") contains, by way of appendices to the Yasna, certain invocations to all divinities.

3. The *Vendidad* (Avestic, *vidaēvō-dātem*: the law against demons), which has been called the Parsi Leviticus, is composed of twenty-two chapters (*fargards*). All of them save the first two, which relate the Creation and the story of Yima, the Iranian Noah, are consecrated to the rules to be observed in the various circumstances of life, in the event of faults committed, or ceremonial uncleanness contracted, or of illness, death, and so forth.

4. The *Yashts* (Avestic, *yashtay*,<sup>1</sup> adoration, prayer) and the *Khorda Avesta* (Lesser Avesta). The Yashts number twenty-one, and are solemn and highly elaborated hymns addressed to the various *yazatas* (divinities, angels, etc., *cf.* p. 18). They are written, to a great extent at least, in verse, and are by no means lacking in passages of high poetical value. Several, moreover, have a markedly mythological character. They include elements of a more popular description than is the religion of the Gāthās, mingled with passages whose inspiration is of far more recent date.

All this literature composed but a minor fraction of the original Avesta, as we learn from Parsi tradition, a tradition confirmed by a passage of the sixth Book of the Dīnkard

<sup>1</sup>We have adopted, in this paper, the transcriptions of Avestic words as given by Professor Bartholomae in his *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, 1904, very slightly modified for the sake of easier printing.

(*infra*, p. 8), a Pahlavi document translated by West.<sup>1</sup> The entire collection composed twenty-one books (*nask*), of which only one, the *Vendidad*, has come down to us entire. The remaining portions of our Avesta are fragments from the other *nasks*, and there are good grounds for believing that the *Bundahishn* and other Pahlavi writings have preserved for us much that was contained in the original Avesta.

B. THE PAHLAVI LITERATURE.—By Pahlavi—a word generally interpreted as signifying *Parthian*—is understood the literary form in which Persian existed during the first centuries of the Christian era. It is also called “Middle Persian,” because it is the connecting link between the Old Persian of the Achaemenid inscriptions and the New Persian, or Persian unqualified, which has been spoken in Persia since the introduction of Mohammedanism. Pahlavi was written in characters which descended from the Aramaic alphabet; and Aramaic influence over this dialect was, indeed, sufficiently marked to introduce into the texts a number of pronouns, verbs, prepositions, adverbs, and substantives altogether Semitic in appearance. To-day, however, it is generally held<sup>2</sup> that these words were mere *ideograms*, symbols, that is, Semitic in origin, but pronounced by means of corresponding Iranian sounds. Thus we find written, *malkān malkā*, king of kings; but it would be pronounced, *shāhān shāh*; the written sign *men*, would be called *az* or *zi* (=of); *lā*, would be spoken *na*, “no,” and so on, very much as in English we write *viz.* (=Latin *videlicet*) and say *namely*; we write *i.e.* and say *that is*. And it is a fact that no one of these Semitic terms subsists in Modern Persia, that their utilization even in Pahlavi seems purely mechanical, and that lexicons were composed in which the Pahlavi ideograms were transcribed in Pāzand (Iranian). There were even Pāzand translations of various Pahlavi documents.

A complete conspectus of Pahlavi literature already edited, or still existing only in manuscript, has been drawn

<sup>1</sup>*Sacred Books of the East*, xxxvii.

<sup>2</sup>Notably by Salemann, *Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie*, i. p. 250.

up by the eminent specialist West.<sup>1</sup> It contains, in the front rank, a translation of the Avesta, of which the main interest is the light it throws upon the view taken of their holy book by the Zoroastrians of the first century of our era. We confess, however, that certain scholars, Professor Mills, for instance, and Darmesteter, entertain a respect for this translation which to others seems exaggerated. It is altogether impossible to deny that in many passages, especially of the Gâthâs, there are many manifest blunders, which reveal a state of thought already remote from that which we can observe in the original text.

Among the other Pahlavi writings which are important for the study of Zoroastrianism in the Sassanid epoch (from c. 212 B.C.), we may quote the *Dinkard*,<sup>2</sup> "Acts of Religion," compiled indeed in the ninth century A.D., but containing a vast and most precious collection of details on the doctrines, manners, traditions, history, literature, etc., of the palmy days of Mazdeism. Especially noticeable is its body of traditions on the life and preaching of the Prophet.

The *Būndahishn*<sup>3</sup> is a Genesis : it contains the Creation of the World, of divine beings, and of men ; the conflict between the creatures of Aūharmazd and those of Aharman ; dissertations on the nature of various creatures, and of nations ; on eschatology ; on geography, and on the mythic history of Iran.

The *Mainyō-i-Khard*, or *Mainōg-i-Khirat*,<sup>4</sup> "The Spirit of Wisdom," contains the answers of this Spirit to 62 questions upon religion propounded by a sage.

The *Artā-Virāf-Nāmak*,<sup>5</sup> the "Divina Commedia" of the Zoroastrians, is a description of heaven and hell as contemplated by the sage Virāf in a vision of seventeen days' duration, induced by means of narcotics.

Of documents later than the Mussulman conquest, a

<sup>1</sup>In the *Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie*, ii. p. 75 seqq.

<sup>2</sup>Tr. by West, *Sacred Books of the East*, xxxvii. and xlvii.

<sup>3</sup>Edited and tr. by Justi, *Der Bundehesh*, Leipzig, 1868. Tr. by West, *S. Books of the East*, v.

<sup>4</sup>Tr. by West, Stuttgart, 1871, and *S.B.E.*, xxiv.

<sup>5</sup>Tr. by Barthélemy, Paris, 1887 (French), and earlier (English) by West.

few still afford a certain interest from the point of view of Avestic studies, in so far as they have preserved for us certain myths or legends in epic form, for instance the celebrated Persian poem of Firdusi, "The Book of the Kings," or else traditions connected with religion, such as several of the *rivâyats*. An account of the Iranian legends with their mythical form in the Avestic or Pahlavi literature has been published by the writer of this essay (Gray, *Mythology of all Races*, vi. 13).<sup>1</sup>

## II. ORIGIN OF THE AVESTA

The most divergent opinions are current among specialists as to the composition of this Iranian Bible, and especially as to the date of its compilation. Professor Geldner,<sup>2</sup> who keeps as close as possible to Mazdean tradition, hold that the older portions of the Avesta go back to Zoroaster himself, and are to be put at some time within the sixth century B.C. This old Avesta will next have suffered severely in the reign of Alexander and his successors. Ardashîr, the first Sassanid king, aided by his high-priest Tansar, is then held to have collected its débris, and the Avestic Canon will finally have been fixed under Shapûr II (310-319 A.D.). Bartholomae and his disciple Reichelt are inclined to thrust back the composition, at least of the gâthâs, further even than the seventh century B.C. This comes as a confirmation of the somewhat bold opinion of Mills, who did not hesitate to speak of 1000 B.C. as the time of the preaching of Zoroaster.

In very recent times these attempts have been reinforced by the striking researches of P. Messina, S.J.,<sup>3</sup> into the origin of the Magians and their lore, and by the accurate study of V. Wesendonk<sup>4</sup> of the whole Zoroastrian problem.

The reasons put forward for supposing that Zoroastrianism can be as ancient as the eighth or the ninth century, before our era, may be summed up as follows:—

<sup>1</sup>Read also A. Nöldeke, *Der Iranische Nationalepos*, p. 132 sqq., in *Grundriss der Ir. Phil.*, i.

<sup>2</sup>*Grundriss Iran. Philol.*, ii. p. 32 sqq.

<sup>3</sup>*Der Ursprung der Magier und die Zoroastrische Religion*, 1930.

<sup>4</sup>*Das Weltbild der Iranier*. 1933. p. 60, sqq.

1. A careful analysis of the statements about the Magians to be found in Plinius Strabo, Dio Chrysostomus, etc., shows that they go back to the work of Hermippus of Smyrna, who wrote *περὶ μάγων*, making use of testimonials dating back to the fifth century.<sup>1</sup> Now at that time Zoroaster was regarded as a quasi-mythical person, who had lived in a very remote past. This opinion is hardly reconcilable with the placing of Zoroaster and of his protector King Vishtaspa, shortly before the time of Darius, the son of Hystaspes.

2. A statement of Xanthus (a historian of the fifth century B.C.), preserved by Diogenes Laertius, tells us that Zoroaster had lived about 600 years before his time.<sup>2</sup> Although this is necessarily approximate, it cannot be neglected because it obviously represents a contemporary Iranian tradition, which is of much more value than what was current in Sassanid times.

3. There is in the Zoroastrian writings not the slightest allusion to Median or Achaemenid dynasties.

4. The social and economic situation which existed in Iran in his time points out to the times when no great kingdom existed, when local kinglets held sway in every valley and, quite decidedly, to a period when Iranians were still partly nomadic, but had begun to settle down in the fertile parts of Northern Persia and take to husbandry. This means a period between 1000 and 700 B.C.

5. Certain names, as *Mazdaka* (B.C. 713) and *Phraortes* (seventh century), (a king of the Medes) refer to conceptions which are essential in Zoroastrianism: Ahura Mazda and the "choice (*fra-var-ti*) of the good path."

6. In Darius' times the name of Mazdah Ahura was crystallized as Auramazda, and the supreme position of the god entirely accepted in higher circles. Both these attainments suppose an evolution of some duration.

7. The language of the gâthâs (Zoroaster's preaching) is very archaic. Although decidedly more adulterated than the oldest Indian dialect (Vedic), it shows many resemblances to it. Even the language of the later Avesta

<sup>1</sup>Messina, o.c., p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>*Ib.*, p. 102. The ordinary reading; 6000 is to be rejected.

has older features than the old-Persian of the inscriptions of Darius.

While the persuasion that Zoroastrianism dates back to about 800 years before Christ is constantly gaining ground, the arguments which had been put forward by James Darmesteter in the introduction to his French translation of the Avesta, and more recently by Fr. M. J. Lagrange, O.P.,<sup>1</sup> in order to reduce the date of the composition to a much more recent epoch, are proving of little value.

The fact that the Avesta has only been written in Sassanid and even post-Sassanid times<sup>2</sup> appears to be of little importance, since extensive texts have been preserved very long through oral<sup>3</sup> tradition, as e.g., the Vedas, the Homeric poems, etc.

The comparatively great number of abstract conceptions in Zoroastrianism, the use of personifications for moral or religious ideas which seemed to indicate the influence of neo-Platonism, cannot have that significance, for such abstractions are especially abundant in the gâthâs, which everybody holds to be old, and again they are often found in the names of Median or Persian rulers, and last, but not least, most of them correspond to Vedic conceptions.<sup>4</sup> It appears that the task of Zoroaster was to emphasize this side of Indo-Iranian tradition, and to expel all that was too material, just as he excluded polytheism and idolatry in order to fix the whole attention on Ahura Mazda. He built up a coherent religious doctrine out of the best elements provided by a tradition in which ethical elements played a great part.

### III. THE RELIGION OF THE GÂTHÂS

The Gâthâs are a series of hymns, or, more exactly, of sermons in verse, as Bartholomae has called them; they are seventeen in number, and are arranged in five

<sup>1</sup>*Revue Biblique*, 1904, p. 42 sqq.

<sup>2</sup>Nau, *Etude historique sur la transmission de l'Avesta* (*Revue Hist. Relig.*, 1927, p. 149 sqq.)

<sup>3</sup>*asha-*, *arta*=ved. *ṛta* "order, rule," *armatay*=ved. *aramati* discretion. See Oldenberg, *Rel. Védig.*, p. 203, sqq., V. Wesendonk, o.c., p. 64, sqq., and my article on *Xshathra Vairya* in *Muséon*, xxxiv.



groups, standing, as an Avestic Canon, in the *Yasna*. Their style is vigorous. They are full of allusions to contemporary personalities and situations. Notably they are constant in their attacks upon the priests of another cult, the *Kavay* and the *Karpan*; they inveigh against nomadic life, brigandage, and the sacrifice of animals. The prophet laments his helplessness, and sighs over the persecutions which he suffers. He invokes as protectors *Vishtâspa*, *Frashaoshtra*, *Jâmâspa*, etc. The whole of this literature bears the stamp of sincerity and good faith. The ideas which are expressed in it survive, no doubt, in the Mazdeism of the Younger-Avesta, but in the *Gâthâs* they are found at an earlier stage of development, and, in this simpler form, certain features of the later religion are completely lacking. Even *Mithra* and *Anâhita* are absent, and the sacrifice of the *haôma* appears not to be held in esteem.

The theory of Dualism is exposed in the third *Gâthâ* (*Yasna* 30).

There were at the beginning of things twin spirits, those of Good and Evil in thought, word, and deed. Of these, the wise man must choose the good, that of the faithful followers of the *Asha*—righteousness, truth, morality. Such persons will reach a supremely happy existence, while the most terrible of destinies awaits the clients of the spirit of falsehood, *drug*.

The universe is divided into the world of the *Asha* and the world of the *Drug*. In this latter are included the evil spirit, *Anrô-Mainyav*; the *daêvas*, devils; their priests, *Kavay*, *Karpan*, etc., and all wicked men, *dregvant*. These constantly persecute the faithful, *ashavan*, and seek to seduce them from their allegiance to good. A continual war rages between the two parties, and it is a work of merit whether a man do harm to the *dregvants* or whether he convert them.

On their side the faithful are supported by the army of good, that is, by *Mazdâh Ahura* surrounded by his heavenly court. This court is composed of abstract entities representing divine attributes. Their original meaning is still everywhere felt in the *Gâthâs*, and their

personality is still fairly fluid.<sup>1</sup> Their number is not as yet defined. Pre-eminent among them are *Asha*, the moral law, righteousness; *Vohu-Manah*, the good spirit; *Khshathra*, royalty; *Armatay*, prudence, humility or piety. Next comes the pair *Haurvatât*, health, prosperity, and *Ameretatât*, immortality. These six entities come later on to form, with Ahura-Mazdâh at their head, the group of the seven *Ameshas-Spentas*, immortal spirits, of which we shall speak below (pp. 16, 17). In the Gâthâs, they are still inseparable from several other personified abstractions: *Sraosha*, obedience; *Ashay*, reward; *Tushnâmatay*, silent submission, and others. These beings serve in some measure as intermediaries between God and man; it is by them that man approaches Mazdâh, and through them that He communicates with man, granting him instruction, benefits, and final recompense.<sup>2</sup>

This ultimate recompense is represented as a world of prosperity and well-being. These advantages are often enough portrayed under a material form which could be suitable only to this life—blessings, for instance, upon family, lands, and possessions. But very frequently, though a clean-cut distinction between the two conceptions be not always easy to draw, the recompense is simultaneously figured as promised only in the next life.<sup>3</sup> This is the good reward, *vanuhî ashî*, which necessarily presupposes not alone the practice of good in the thoughts, words, and actions of this life, but a tremendous test at this life's end, the *mazê yânnô*. This recompense,

<sup>1</sup>Cf. 14 p. 3, *et seq.*, and contrast 13 p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>As an interesting parallelism of conception, without assuming the possibility of any relation in fact, we may recall the Jewish tendency to substitute the Angel of Yahweh, or the Face, or Glory, of God for the direct divine agency, in occasions of inter-communication between God and man; moreover, the growing inclination, accelerated by some forms of the philosophy of the Logos, to make of the divine Wisdom almost a self-subsistent attribute, a hypostasis other than the Divine essence itself.

<sup>3</sup>Though even here it is often enough described as a possession of riches, *Khshathra ishtôish*, *magahyd*, *rdyd*, *ashish*; or of similar advantages, *savannô*. Cf. Carnoy, *Muséon*, ix. p. 121.

this kingdom so ardently desired, is generally called "The Kingdom of the Delights of Vohu-Manah," because it is the result, for the faithful, of their good spirit, *mens bona*, that is to say of the *state of soul*—an idea essential to all Gâthic doctrine—which is at the very root of all conversion, of all virtuous and religious life. It is the love of good, the spirit of holiness, the spirit of Ahura-Mazdâh, which must be that too of each one of His faithful.<sup>1</sup> This conception is distinct from that of the *Spenta Mainyav*, *bonus spiritus*, which is but another name for Ahura Mazdâh in so far as He is opposed to Anrô Mainyav, the "evil spirit."

Finally, the moral life of the disciple of Zoroaster, according to the Gâthâs, may be summed up as follows:—

Animated by the Good Spirit (*Vohu-Manah*), the true disciple of Zoroaster takes his stand against the Spirit of Ignorance and Falsehood (*drug*), its satellites (*daêva*), its priests (*kavay*, *karpan*, etc.), its pomps (sacrifices of living creatures, and possibly of the *haôma*), and against the works which put a man in its power—brigandage, lies, insolence; and he chooses with wise prudence (*ârmatay*) the service of the God of Knowledge (*Mazdâh*), who is also the Spirit of Good (*Spenta Mainyav*). His thoughts, words, and actions must be conformed to the moral law, the law of truth (*asha*), and to submission to God (*sraosha*). He will be guided by a spiritual adviser (*rata*), and will lead the life of a peaceable citizen, devoted to agriculture, and full of respect for the creatures of Mazdâh, and in particular for the ox, in which animal are as it were concentrated the temporal benefits of God. In this manner he will be treading in the path that leads to the longed-for kingdom (*Khshathra vairya*), the Kingdom of Good, which is that too of all manner of goods, of prosperity (*haurvatât*), and of immortality (*amertatât*), obtaining in this way the recompense (*âdâ*, *ashay*) which he hopes for, both in this life and in the next, a

<sup>1</sup>A special study on Vohu Manah has been published by the writer of this essay in the *Volume of Oriental Studies presented to E. G. Browne*, p. 91 sqq.

recompense to be made perfect when the last test to come shall have been accomplished.

#### IV. MAZDEISM MATURED

Now that we have given a general view of what we may reasonably believe to be the oldest and purest phase of the religion of Zoroaster, we must perforce proceed to describe succinctly what is generally understood by the name of *Mazdeism*, that is to say, the religion which is revealed to us in the Avesta taken as a whole, the religion, namely, which became that of all Persia under the Sassanids. This was the period when Mazdeism reigned triumphant, and, to understand how the Zoroastrians of this splendid epoch understood their religion, we shall, of course, have to take into account the Pahlavi literature which we described above, p. 7.

A. DUALISM.—The Gâthâs have already presented us with all the essentials of a complete dualistic system. This system, in the Mazdean religious philosophy, crystallizes into a "doctrine of two principles, independent, hostile, and essentially opposed the one to the other,"<sup>1</sup> the Spirit of Good, and the Spirit of Evil. Each is a Creator, the one of the good spirits, *Ameshas-Spentas*, *Yazatas*, and of all good and pure existences; the other of demons, *daévas*, *drugs*, and of all that is bad, whether in the material or in the spiritual sense of the word. The creation of the second is produced explicitly to oppose that of the former, and struggles against it, and modifies it. The fight between the two principles is constant, and shall not cease till the end of time, when the Spirit of Good shall conquer, and shall annihilate his adversary, who, in the older system, was co-eternal with himself.

Dualism is the supreme effort of Iranian thought to solve the problem of the origin of Evil. It is a solution which, in spite of its co-ordination of these two principles, yet does not hinder Mazdeism from approaching closely to Monotheism. Doubtless certain

<sup>1</sup>Casartelli, *La Philosophie Religieuse du Mazdéisme sous les Sassanides*, p. 44 sqq.

philosophical restrictions were inevitable in a system which started from a dualistic principle: for instance, Ahura-Mazdâh (Parsi, *Ormazd*) could not be considered as *Infinite*, since His existence is necessarily limited by that of Anro-Mainyav (Parsi, *Ahriman*). Yet Ahura-Mazdâh is well worthy of the name of God, and was in fact adored as God. The evil spirit was, if I may so describe him, a *negative* entity. The desire to reduce this dualism to unity did actually create various notions of a philosophical character, such as the *Zrvan akarana*, Unlimited Time, which was more or less confused with the idea of destiny (*bakhta*), and was held to have engendered both Spirits alike. Certain philosophers again attempted to argue that the Spirit of Evil could have been born from a bad thought of the Spirit of Good.

B. AHURA-MAZDÂH AND THE GOOD SPIRITS.—Ahura-Mazdâh—"the God who sees all, remembers all (*cf.* Avestic *mazdâh*, memory; Sanscrit *medhâ*, wisdom)—is omniscient, omnipotent, supreme, sovereign, good, beneficent, merciful.<sup>1</sup> He is Creator (*dâtar*) of the ten Ameshas-Spentas, of the Yazatas, of Paradise, of the vault of the sky, of the blazing sun, of the shining moon, of the manifold stars, of life, of the wind, of the air, of fire, of water, of earth, plants, animals, metals, and of man" (*Dînkart*, ii. 81-3). From His creatures He expects honour, gratitude, and prayer.

The *Ameshas-Spentas* (Immortal Holy Ones) are the six principal individualities among those which already play so important a part in the Gâthâs. Their personality became ever more definite as time went on, and ultimately formed a group limited to six, among whom the government of the whole material world was apportioned.

Vohu-Manah, whom Plutarch calls *εὐνοία*, "good mind or thought," continues to hold an essential and primary position. He is the first creation of Mazdâh. He is the Councillor of God and of men. But he is moreover the special protector of domestic animals, an office for which no adequate explanation is as yet

<sup>1</sup>*Cf.* Casartelli, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

forthcoming. Similarly *Asha Vahishta* (Plutarch, ἀλήθεια, truth) is no longer the Moral Law alone, but also guardian of fire; *Khshathra Vairya* is no longer merely the Good Reign (Plutarch, εὐνομία), the personification of the beneficent power of Mazdâh, which is to constitute the happiness of the righteous man in this world and the next, but he is also patron of metals, *Spenta Ârmatay*, "holy humility," and continues to be the antithesis of *Tarômatay*, whom the Greeks would call ὕβρις, wanton insolence. Pahlavi translates Ârmatay by a word meaning "wisdom," and Plutarch by σοφία; and this translation is indeed appropriate to the rôle played by this attribute in the Gâthâs. In its material aspect, it presides over earth. *Haurvatât* (health) and *Ameretatât* (immortality) remain what they were, the twin benefits in which the happiness of the elect consists. Plutarch translates them by πλοῦτος, wealth, which, it will be remembered, is well in the spirit of the Gâthâs, where the felicity of the longed-for kingdom is habitually represented under the designation of riches; but, in their secondary capacity, they have become the protecting genius of waters and plants respectively.

THE YAZATAS.—Below Mazdâh and the Ameshas-Spentas come the *Yazatas*, "beings worthy of veneration." These are, for the most part, ancient Aryan divinities reduced, in the Avestic system, to the rank of auxiliary angels. Of these we may quote *Âtar*, the personification of that Fire which plays so important a part in the Mazdean cult that its members have actually become known as fire worshippers. Fire was for them the symbol of the Divinity, and the consecrated emblem of faith. In its personified form as a Yazata, it is the son of Mazdâh and clothes itself in five different guises. Its essence is especially manifested in the appearance of the *hvarenah*, aureole or glory which enhaloes kings and priests. By the side of this genius of fire is found that too of the waters; this is *Anâhita*, the Anaïtis of Greek writers.

Next to them come the divinities who preside at the

judgment of the dead, *Mithra*, *Sraosha*, *Rashnu*. The last two are personified abstractions; *Rashnu* is *Justice* and *Sraosha* is religious *Obedience*.

The cult of *Mithra* is more important than that of the two others. He is originally identical with the Hindu *Mitra*, who was the faithful companion of *Varuna*, the Indian equivalent of *Mazdâh*. Both are "moral" gods, and guardians of the *rta* (Avestic *asha*) and the avengers of sins. In the *Veda*, *Mitra* is especially regarded as he who keeps men to their plighted word. In the Iranian system, *Mithra* is everywhere quite definitely the God of contracts, so much so that he has actually been called the personification of the idea of Contract.<sup>1</sup> In the *Avesta* (*Yasht* x.) he clearly appears as the God of the *given word*; and it is by him that Persians swore. He is in consequence God of military honour, God of soldiers, and this explains his popularity among victorious armies and the enormous diffusion of his cult—strongly modified, no doubt, by alien influences—among the Roman legions in the imperial era of Roman history.<sup>2</sup> He is the God who sees all things, even the most secret and hidden. In the *Avesta* the sun is represented as his eye, an idea which can be found too in the *Veda*, applied to *Mitra* and *Varuna*, the guardians of the moral law. This last piece of symbolism led to the identification of the Iranian god with the sun in the Mithraic worship of the Roman empire. Hence *Mithra* is one of the most popular divinities of Iran, and his absence from the *Gâthâs* must be due to a deliberate exclusion which Mazdeism could not maintain. Beside *Mithra*, soldiers used to venerate *Verethraghna*, the presiding spirit of Victory.

THE FRAVASHIS.—These spirits, whose name is already visible in the proper name *Phraortes*<sup>3</sup> a century before

<sup>1</sup>Meillet, *Journ. As.*, ninth series, x. p. 142 sqq.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. 15 p. 15, *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup>The name *fravashi* or *fra-vr-ti* means "choice," i.e., "choice of the good path," hence religion, conscience. It is a synonym of *daēnâ* "religion," which also means "conscience of the soul after death."

Darius, are closely analogous to the Roman Genii<sup>1</sup> and to our guardian angels. They are attached each to a specified human person, though they exist before his birth. After death they unite themselves to the soul of the dead man, and may indeed have been originally a sort of Dii Manes.<sup>2</sup> Gods no less than men have their Fravashis; and these spirits, who are the source for their protégé of a thousand benefits, receive a special cultus in return.

A conception fairly similar to that of the Fravashis is that of the *Geush urvan*, "the soul of the ox," which is indeed the deified soul of the primordial ox, which, according to the Bundahishn, lived three thousand years with the first man *Gayō Maretan*, and was the progenitor of all oxen, and indeed of all the other good things of earth, of which he was the symbol.

C. THE EVIL SPIRITS.—*Anro-Mainyav* is, as we have seen, the evil counterpart of Ahura-Mazdâh. He is a wicked being, anxious to hurt the creatures of the good creation. Instead of being wise, he is ignorant. He is afraid of Mazdâh. While the Good Spirit lives in the realm of joy and light, the Evil Spirit lives in the darkness and the abyss. He longs to enslave the creatures of Mazdâh by causing them to commit sins, especially those of infidelity, doubt, avarice, and, above all, of falsehood, or to contract defilement by contact with what is impure. It is he who has put poison in plants, and inflicted on unlucky humanity no less than 4,333 sorts of illnesses. He is often called *Drug*, "Deception," without further qualification, especially in the Gâthâs; and this title is sometimes applied to other demons too, especially to him who is assigned as adversary to Sraosha, and to Nasav (*Cadaver*), the demon of death, who seeks to make himself master of corpses.

Under *Anro-Mainyav* are marshalled the *daêvas*, "demons," and among these, six stand out prominent, of whom a group has been formed explicitly antithetic to the Ameshas-Spentas. Little would be gained were we to write out a catalogue of their names. Among

<sup>1</sup>Cf. 14 p. 6.      <sup>2</sup>Cf. 14 p. 11.



them we find *Aeshma*, demon of violence, and *Aka Manah*, the "bad spirit," the enemy of Vohu-Manah and others. There are some other demons or maleficent beings who play a rôle not without its importance; such are *Búshyañstā*, demon of sloth; *Afraosha*, demon of dryness; and besides these we find the *Yátus*, or sorcerers, and the *Pairikās* (whence comes, in Persian, *Peri*), which are spirits of seduction.

D. THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD AND OF MAN.—Before Creation, nothing existed save Infinite Time, *zrvan akarana*. With creation begins a long period of 12,000 years. During the first 3,000 years, Ahura-Mazdâh kept His creation within the limits of the spiritual and immaterial. The *fravashis* of creatures yet to be, alone existed. This space of years concludes with the awakening of Añro-Mainyav, who till then had lain as it were in a torpor and inactive. Ahura-Mazdâh offers him peace, but he refuses it, and war is declared between them for the remaining 9,000 years. Mazdâh strikes his adversary with the omnipotent prayer of the *Ahuna-Vairya* and stuns him.

The next 3,000 years are occupied with the production, in their material form, of those creatures whose spiritual prototypes had already existed during the first era. At the beginning of the seventh millennium Añro-Mainyav reappears on the stage and profoundly injures all creation. To start with, he slays the primordial bull and the first man. From their dead bodies proceed respectively animals and men. A sort of golden age succeeds, over which an ancient king, Yima, is held to have presided. The golden age lasts for a thousand years, and comes to an end owing to a sin committed by the king, who, as a chastisement, is dethroned by the dragon *Azhi Dahâka*. This Yima is an Indo-Iranian character. He corresponds to the *Yama* of the Hindus, who was the first man, and also king of the infernal regions. He gained further celebrity by the construction of a shelter (*vara*) in which he protected mankind during the miseries occasioned by a severe winter. In Persian legendary lore, he plays a great part under the name of *Jamshêd* (cf. Omar Khayyâm, *Rubâiyât*, xvii.).

The concluding 3,000 years open with the revelation made to Zoroaster, and the conversion of the King *Vishtaspa*. There follows the appearance of a series of prophets, *Saoshyant*, and towards the end of time, that of *Astvatsereta*, the *Saoshyant par excellence*. At the conclusion of the twelve thousand years shall come the general resurrection, the victory of Mazdâh over his enemy, and the initiation of a new period of Infinite Time.

E. MORAL SYSTEM.—Mankind finds himself at the centre of the world, and in him focusses the battle between the two spirits. But by the practice of virtue he can place himself on the side of Mazdâh, and contribute to the victory of good over evil. By sin, he makes himself the prey of evil spirits, a *dregvant*. The duties of the *ashavan*, or righteous, are the up-keep of the worship of Ahura-Mazdâh and of the good spirits, the preservation of the sacred fire, and the veneration of the dead. Of personal virtues, it is honesty and straightforwardness that are most highly valued. But of the Zoroastrian is demanded the observation of scrupulous personal purity, and this consists not only in abstinence from adultery, rape, unnatural vice, and the like, but also in all manner of ritual performances, often grotesque enough, relating to the sexual relations, and to all contact with ceremonially unclean persons or objects, especially corpses. Charity towards the poor, hospitality towards the stranger, are likewise preached as virtues, enjoined, and practised. In the sphere of social virtues, the duty of the tillage of the soil is exalted to the rank of a primary virtue. To cut a tree becomes a sin. The tenderest care surrounds the ox and the dog. This extremely lofty moral code offers no ground for reproach at all, save the rather galling and childish character of some of those minute observances on which, with exaggerated solemnity, it insists. It is the *Vendidâd* which gives these details, and sometimes enjoins what we should consider trifling under sanctions as grave as those which belong to genuinely criminal actions. Thus it is as grave an offence, for instance, to refuse its food to a dog as to

allow a priest to die of starvation (Vendîdâd, xiii. 59, 60). Moreover, the code is disfigured for a Western conscience by the canonization as a virtue in the Pahlavi books of the *Khvaêthvâdâtha* (Pahlavi *Khvetukh-dâh*), for this is merely incestuous marriage. This curious aberration appears due to a desire to flatter royalty and the nobles who did actually practise these marriages to preserve untainted the purity of their blood and breeding. Parsis to-day, however, deny that the word in question is to be translated in this way at all.

The penances imposed for the expiation of sins are manifold: death is the penalty for merely touching a corpse; other sins involve the recitation of the *paitita*, a sort of *Confiteor*; or a public sacrifice, an aspersion, a sort of retreat lasting nine days, or blows with an ox-goad. The tariff of these blows is worked out in the Vendîdâd in view of the various sorts of possible sins. In our own day—and doubtless this is no recent innovation—these have been replaced by penances and offerings made to priests on a similar scale of more or less. Certain crimes, however, for instance cremation and sins against nature, cannot be expiated, and make the guilty man *peshô-tanû*, "lost body," that is to say irretrievably the prey of the Drug.

F. RELIGIOUS LIFE AND WORSHIP.—The Zoroastrian temples—at first of the simplest possible description—contain the urn in which the holy fire burns. Over it perfumes are from time to time sprinkled, and no one approaches it save having veiled his face with the *paitidâna*, lest his breath pollute the pure flame. Each Zoroastrian has, moreover, a sacred fire in his own house.<sup>1</sup>

The liturgy includes the daily recitation of a few verses of the Avesta. For this purpose the sacred book has been divided into short portions, which are arranged according to the date on which they must be recited, not according to their natural inter-relation, exactly like the gospels in our Missals. While he recites the prayers, the priest holds in his hands the *baresman*, or bundle of twigs.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. 14 p. 5.

Each month and each day has its patron. The chief feasts are the New Year (Persian, *naurôz*) (which has remained the greatest feast of the year in Mahometan Persia); the equinoxes, consecrated to Mithra; the *gahambars*, at the change from one season to another; the Days of the Dead at the end of the year; the days of Full Moon and of New Moon. The sacrifice consists of an oblation of bread and of *myazda*. This last term signifies *meat*, but has come to be applied to milk. Besides this, there was the sacrifice of the *haôma* (the Hindu *soma*), an intoxicating plant, of which the stems were crushed in a mortar and the juice strained off; this was presented before the fire and drunk by the officiating priest (Avestic, *zaotar*; Persian, *zôt*) and his acolytes (*raspi*). The priests are also called *môbeds*, which is the Avestic *mogu-paiti*, "Chief of the Magi."

A child at birth has his lips steeped in *haôma*, but he does not become a full Zoroastrian till, between the ages of 12 and 15 years, he receives the girdle *kushti*, which he will always wear thenceforward save at night. The presentation of this girdle forms the centre of a ceremony which lasts nine days. Marriage is a duty for the Zoroastrian, and its ritual, as celebrated to-day, is borrowed from Hindu customs. When a Zoroastrian is about to die, a dog is brought to his side, of which the glance is to keep at bay, for a while, the attack of the savage Drug *Nasav*. Directly the soul has left the body, *Nasu* seizes the corpse, which forthwith becomes impure. To elude this Drug, and to avoid contracting the worst of all defilements, the assistants lay out the corpse, their hands covered with sacking. The dead man is then carried to the *dakhma* or Tower of Silence, and there becomes the prey of impure animals. Neither water, nor earth, nor fire may be polluted by contact with a corpse.

G. ESCHATOLOGY.—For three days the soul of the Mazdean haunts his home, and then takes wing for the judgment tribunal, where it presents itself before Mithra, Sraosha, and Rashnu. Its merits and demerits are weighed in the balances.<sup>1</sup> If neither scale sinks, its

<sup>1</sup>Cf. 9 p. 21.

faults counterbalance its good actions, and the soul proceeds to the *hamēstakān* or "equilibrium," a place where it will have nothing to suffer save from heat and cold. Else it must take its way to the abode of bliss, or of damnation.

In this latter case it has to cross the bridge of Chinwæt, which the righteous soul finds broad and easy, while the wicked soul falls from it into the abyss. Paradise (Persian, *Behesht*=*Vahishta*; the most excellent) is the home of eternal light, the lovely dwelling-place of Vohu-Manah, where the souls rest upon rugs of gold.

The damned soul, however, is hurled into infernal darkness so thick that the hand can feel it. Arda Viráf, the Persian Dante, gives us, in his celebrated vision, a vivid account of what he saw in hell. He waxes eloquent over the "innumerable torments," so fearful that "he who has been but a single day in hell cries out, 'Alas! are they not over, the nine thousand years that are to pass before hell shall be opened?'"

And indeed, in Mazdean eschatology hell is not eternal. The General Resurrection is to renew the entire world. At that time a rain of molten lead shall submerge the earth, and all men, living or risen, shall be swallowed up in it. This is to be the final trial of which the Gâthâs spoke. For the righteous, it will involve no suffering, but for the guilty it shall be torture indescribable. And yet, there is not one but shall come out from thence made wholly pure, and all men shall thenceforward live together for "infinite time," in a world whence evil shall have disappeared.

CONCLUSION.—Taken as a whole, the Mazdean Religion has a strong claim upon our interest, and indeed our admiration. It is among the most ancient types of systematic religion, if not the most ancient absolutely; it presents itself as essentially a *revelation* and a coherent body of *doctrine*, as do Buddhism, Mahometanism, etc., and is in sharp contrast with those "natural" religions which do not claim to have had any particular founder, but exist in the ideas and practices of a people as ancient

tradition only. This characteristic at once explains the relative perfection of its teaching, and especially the *organization* of its various features. Hence, too, the abstract character which it has from the outset, and the pre-eminent position which is assigned in it to moral considerations. The further we trace them back towards their origin, the more closely similar do the religions of India and Persia appear to be, both in what touches popular beliefs, and in the ever more sublime and abstract view taken of the Âdityas and of the Ameshas-Spentas respectively.

If, however, the starting-point is identical, the lines of development have been essentially different, and that in perfect conformity with the radically diverse temperaments of the two races concerned. The imaginative Hindu, a dreamer, an ecstatic, lost himself in the clouds of a pantheistic mysticism, and found rest in Brahmanism and Buddhism. The Iranian, essentially a man of action, created a clear and coherent system, where all is carefully mapped out for the faithful to find no difficulty in following the path which should not only lead to the great reward beckoning to him from a hereafter of bliss, but which should carry him across this life adorned with the virtues of a good and quiet citizen, generous and laborious, a prosperous landowner and a worthy father of a family.<sup>1</sup>

Zoroastrianism, being a body of doctrine held as true, addresses itself, in principle at least, to all mankind. In practice, however, it remained essentially Iranian. But we know that in Persia at any rate its history was one of triumph, and was the State religion during those centuries when the Sassanid dynasty held the throne. It showed itself, during that period, most intolerant towards Christianity, and persecuted Christians savagely. In return, later history proved more cruel towards it than towards any other oriental cult. The Arabs introduced Islam into Persia as early as the seventh century ;

<sup>1</sup>Compare the ideal of ancient Rome, 14 pp. 3—5, and note the absence in the Italian religion of any adequate scheme of future reward or punishment, 14 pp. 10—11.

and if they did not immediately suppress the whole Mazdean cult at a blow, yet, by means of an obstinate rather than violent persecution, they first of all exhausted it, and then caused it gradually to disappear almost entirely. Persia contains to-day no more than a few thousands of pitiable Guebres. The Parsis of Bombay are now the only genuine representatives of Zoroastrianism ; they were originally a group of Mazdeans who emigrated to India to avoid the Mussulman persecution. To-day they number but 70,000, and have thus perpetuated until our own times what Zoroastrianism contained of best and most inspiring.

From the dynamic point of view, that, I mean, of the influence exerted by its ideas, Mazdeism is undoubtedly important, yet less so than might at first sight appear. The Mithraism<sup>1</sup> which played so startling a part in the Roman Empire of the third century comes no doubt from Iran, but appears to draw its original stock of ideas from the popular religion of that country rather than from Zoroastrianism strictly so called. Moreover, it continued to assimilate a large amount of matter derived from the religions of Chaldea and of Asia Minor. Manichæism<sup>2</sup> did indeed popularize the dualistic principle in Europe, but it forms a highly complicated system of doctrines which are drawn from the most diverse sources.

As for the resemblances between Judaism and Mazdeism, these too appear, at first sight, more numerous than they really are. To start with, the analogies we may detect in the Gâthâs must rigorously be distinguished from those which we notice in the later parts of the Avesta and in the Pahlavi literature. As regards the latter, particularly in what concerns cult, cosmology, and eschatology, it would be imprudent to exclude every Semitic influence upon the Iranian belief, though this influence apparently could do no more than modify the conceptions which it found, and which go back to the oldest Persian stratum.

As for the existence of mutual influence at any very remote date, here too we must show ourselves very careful, owing to the great uncertainty which attends

<sup>1</sup>Cf. 15 p. 15, *et seq.* <sup>2</sup>Cf. 16.

any effort to date the Zoroastrian scriptures. And again, if we examine the similarities on which certain scholars have dwelt, we find them less striking than we thought, and are more probably due to coincidence than to borrowing from either side. Professor Nathan Söderblom<sup>1</sup> has thrown doubt upon the opinion which contends that it was from Persia that the Jews received their doctrine of a resurrection of the body. It is true that the belief in a resurrection properly so called—which is not, however, explicit in the Gâthâs—is very old in Persia; but we find it there in a rather different form from that of the Jewish belief, which, moreover, we can watch slowly developing on independent lines in Israel. The Persian demonology alone seems quite certainly to have stimulated Jewish thought upon this topic,<sup>2</sup> though not even here did it rob it of its independence.<sup>3</sup> But the name of the demon, Asmodeus (who appears in Tobias) being that of a daêva, *Aeshma daêva*, well known among the satellites of Anro-Mainyav, it is clear that the Jews were not averse to utilizing occasionally the Mazdean demonology, which could not but develop rapidly in the religion of dualism.

People interested in the history of religious ideas will notice with more interest how elevated are certain beliefs among the Aryas at a distant period when it is the fashion to portray them as given over to the mere worship of the forces of Nature. He will, further, observe with satisfaction that if the genuinely noble religion of Zoroaster did develop, in certain points, ideas and practices analogous to those of Judaism and Christianity, that is because it answered to the same moral exigencies of human nature. Yet these analogies, especially those of external cult and piety, only render the more striking the absence in Mazdeism—a very pure, but chiefly practical system—of that intense religious life, which alone can develop and sustain heroism.

<sup>1</sup>*La Vie Future d'après le Mazdéisme*, p. 260 sqq.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup>Perhaps the likeness and unlikeness of the Ameshas-Spentas to the late Jewish conception of seven superior angels "which stand before the face of God," is the best possible example at once of interdependence and independence.



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# SEMITIC RELIGIONS

(exclusive of the Religion of Babylonia and Assyria,  
and of the Religion of Israel)

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## INTRODUCTORY

As the title of this paper implies, the subject of our discussion is not one but manifold, since we cannot speak with accuracy of "the Semitic Religion" (in the singular), as we speak without fear of correction of the Catholic Religion or of the Religion of Islam. In the ancient Semitic world there were "gods many and lords many,"<sup>1</sup> and this, as we shall see, implied not merely polytheistic beliefs but a wide variety of cultus and practice. Hence the title of the standard English work *The Religion of the Semites*, by the late William Robertson Smith<sup>2</sup> is somewhat misleading, even when read with its sub-title: "The Fundamental Institutions." In so short a treatment of so vast a subject we can only attempt a bare outline of these fundamental institutions, together with a few references to some of the more striking idiosyncrasies of the various groups that make up the Semitic peoples. We shall not be able to say a great deal about the *origin* of the Semitic religions. Little is known with certainty regarding this, since the religions, when first we meet with them in historical record, had already attained to some degree of maturity or even, not infrequently, of decline.

<sup>1</sup>I. Cor. viii. 5.

<sup>2</sup>References throughout are to the 3rd (1927) edition, which has an introduction and some 200 pages of additional notes by Prof. S. A. Cook.

## THE SEMITES

The Semites, or the Semitic peoples, were and are those who speak the Semitic languages. This, the philological grouping, seems the best and simplest of all attempted classifications, though it suffers from the inconvenience of including certain peoples, such as the Philistines and the southern Hittites, who, although they adopted the Canaanite language of their environment, were by ethnographical standards non-Semitic. The term "Semitic" is derived from the table of the nations in Gen. x., where the then-known world is divided among the sons of Noe. It is clear that the sacred author has followed a political and geographical grouping rather than a strictly ethnographical and linguistic one, since Canaan, ancestor of the Canaanites, a Semitic people, and Heth, ancestor of the Hittites, who were neither Semitic nor Hamitic, are grouped among the sons of Cham.<sup>1</sup> In our modern usage we may agree with Prof. Stanley Cook<sup>2</sup> that "it is preferable to apply the term 'Semite' to certain languages and the people speaking them in south-west Asia, rather than to any specific type of civilization."

The Semitic languages, which show an even greater resemblance to one another than do the Romance languages of Europe, are divided by philologists into four main groups. There is, first, the *East Semitic* group, which comprises the almost identical Babylonian and Assyrian languages of Mesopotamia and which represents the earliest Semitic speeches, since they were in use by 3000 B.C. at the latest. Next, there is the *North Semitic* or Aramaic section, including East Aramaic, principally represented by Syriac, and West Aramaic, which comprises Palestinian Aramaic, Palmyrene, Nabatean and Samaritan. Then we have the *Western* group, which has, as its earliest members, the languages of Palestine during the earlier Biblical periods, e.g., Canaanite, Moabite, Phœnician and Biblical Hebrew. Finally, there is the *South Semitic* group, principally known to us in Arabic and Ethiopic.<sup>3</sup>

The religion of the *East Semitic* group (Assyro-Babylonian) and the religion of *Israel* are receiving separate treatment in this series. Our immediate concern is with the remainder of the *Western* group and with the *Northern* and *Southern* sections. If a preference has to be shown for any particular division it will be for that of the West, which includes the Canaanites, whose ritual practices and worship so often "made Israel to sin" during the Old Testament period.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For the table of the nations, consult Dr. Paul Heinisch, *Das Buch Genesis*, 1930, ch. x., Die Völkertafel, pp. 187-97.

<sup>2</sup>Art. "Semites" in *Chambers' Encyclopædia*, 1927, vol. ix., p. 247.

<sup>3</sup>See, in particular, Mr. G. R. Driver's paper on "The Modern Study of the Hebrew Language" in *The People and the Book*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1925, pp. 73-120. The date of first appearance of these languages varies considerably.

<sup>4</sup>A bibliography is given at the end of this pamphlet and many

The countries occupied by the peoples of these three groups correspond roughly to the Arabian peninsula with the Sinai Peninsula and Arabia Petraea, to modern Palestine and Syria, and to the district between the Mediterranean, the Taurus mountains, Armenia and Mesopotamia, which is nowadays covered, for the most part, by the area of Kurdistan. In the north, it is worth noting: "The present dividing line of peoples which speak respectively Arabic and Turkish marks the Semite's immemorial limit. So soon as the land-level of northern Syria attains a mean altitude of 2,500 feet, the Arab tongue is chilled to silence."<sup>1</sup>

The sources for our study of the ancient Semitic religions are, first, the Bible and some early writers, such as Pausanias, Herodotus, Philo of Byblos, and others; secondly, the large and ever-growing number of inscriptions left by these peoples; lastly, a wealth of monuments, such as temples, high places, tomb-chambers, and statues, which in the hands of competent archaeologists can be made to yield the secret of their customary employment in a remote past.

## GODS AND GODDESSES

Readers of *Paradise Lost* will remember that, at the council of the infernal peers, there assisted "Moloch, horrid King besmear'd with blood," "Chemos, the obscene dread of Moab's sons," "Astarte, Queen of Heav'n with crescent Horns"<sup>2</sup> and many others, who are easily recognizable as Semitic divinities, transformed by Milton into rebel angels. A study of the last four hundred lines of Book I. would, in fact, be an excellent introduction to the names and chief characteristics of the pagan deities of Syria and Palestine.

It is evidently impracticable here to give a full description of the various Semitic pantheons. We can, however, discuss the Semites' general attitude towards their divinities and give some account of the more celebrated divine titles.

We need not delay long over the question of *monotheism* and *polytheism*. From all our existing records only one conclusion seems acceptable—that, throughout the whole period that comes under our observation, the Semites were polytheists, or, in Lagrange's words:<sup>3</sup> "There is at least one conclusion to which nobody at the present day

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important authorities—Lagrange, Robertson Smith, Vincent, Cook, etc.—are quoted in the course of the study. My debt to the first-named is considerable in regard of both form and substance.

<sup>1</sup>*The Ancient East*, by D. G. Hogarth. Home University Library, 1914, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>See Bk. I., lines 392, 406 and 439.

<sup>3</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 438.

can refuse his assent, namely, that the Semitic religions were religions like the others, polytheistic religions . . . ." The attempt made by Renan in the fifties and sixties of last century to prove that there was an imperious tendency towards monotheism in the Semitic world, and that the desert was the home of monotheism<sup>1</sup> is now generally discredited. In the expression of a recent writer, the well-known philologist, Prof. D. C. Brockelmann, of Halle: "There can really be no more question of Renan's hypothesis concerning the original tendency of the Semites to monotheism."<sup>2</sup> In his own day, Robertson Smith was equally critical of the suggestion made by Renan. "The monotheism of the patriarchs in the Book of Genesis is not natural monotheism, and it does not resemble anything which has existed in Semitic lands, apart from the influence of Judaism and Christianity."<sup>3</sup> In any event, as Fr. Schmidt insists,<sup>4</sup> the proof of any early monotheistic stage in Semitic religion would furnish no convincing evidence for primitive monotheism in general, since "the Semites are a comparatively long way from the real origin of humanity."

1. EL.—Among the Semitic names for the divinities, none can compare in antiquity and universality of diffusion with that of EL, which corresponds among western Semites to the Assyro-Babylonian ILU.

Its etymology is uncertain and is discussed at some length by Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80; by the Oxford *Hebrew Lexicon*, s.v. pp. 41-42; and by Spurrell in his *Notes on the Text of the Book of Genesis*, 2nd ed., 1896: Appendix, pp. 407 ff. The more likely meanings are (i.) the strong one; (ii.) the leader or lord; (iii.) the one whom men strive to reach, "the goal of all men's longing and all men's striving" (de Lagarde). The third meaning is that favoured by Lagrange.

It is of some importance to decide whether El is used as a *proper* name or as an appellative, that is, a *common* or class noun. On this point the evidence is somewhat conflicting.

It is attested as a *proper* name by a number of writers (Diodorus Siculus, Damascius, Servius); by a Phœnician inscription from Umm el-'Awâmid, published by Clermont-Ganneau,<sup>5</sup> which is held

<sup>1</sup>*Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, Paris, 1855, pp. 5 ff.

<sup>2</sup>*Allah und die Götzen, der Ursprung des vorislamischen Monotheismus*, p. 120, quoted by Fr. W. Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, Eng. tr., London, 1931, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>*Lectures and Essays*, p. 612, a review written in 1887 of Renan's *Histoire du Peuple d'Israel*.

<sup>4</sup>*Op. et loc.cit.*

<sup>5</sup>See Lagrange, *op. cit.* p. 71, n. 7. For a different reading, see Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris f. semitische Epigraphik*, II., 165-7.

to give the reading "to the Lord, to El"; and by money from Byblos, which bears a representation of El as a man standing with three pairs of wings<sup>1</sup>. The corresponding goddess, Elât or Elôt, had collegiate bodies of priests at Carthage and a sanctuary was erected in her honour in Sardinia, where there is an inscription: "to the great lady, to Elât." She is represented as riding on a bull. El is seen to occur four times in the Hadad inscription from Zenjirli in Northern Syria, and is certainly used there as a proper name.<sup>2</sup> Apart from this example, the word is not found in Aramæan inscriptions, either as a proper name or as a class name, except in such composite proper names as Hazâ'el (El sees), Tobe'el (El is good), and the like. At Safâ, on the borders of the Syrian desert, inscriptions have been found in which, as regards proper names, "the god El takes by a long way the first place."<sup>3</sup> In South Arabia, the inscriptions testify to the fact that El was the proper name of a god and phrases recur, such as "priests of El and Athtar," "servant of El and of Athtar." Finally, in Ethiopic, a certain number of proper names are compounded with El.

As against these examples, one must set others in which *El* is clearly employed as an *appellative*. Among the Phœnicians and their colonists, the Carthaginians, El is more ordinarily used as a class name. It is to be gathered from the inscriptions that Elim was the plural of El, and this plural was used with a singular proper name, even a feminine, as in such phrases as: "Elim Nergal," "the god Nergal." In Aramaic, it is well known that *alah* or *alaha*, with its feminine and plural forms, was used as a common noun for "god" or "gods." In Southern Arabia, in addition to the use of El as a proper name, it is not seriously contested that it was employed with *ilâh* as an appellative. It may be added that in the Assyro-Babylonian religion, "one does not perceive that . . . the word *ilu* expressed anything other than the common name 'god.'"<sup>4</sup>

From these instances it may readily be seen that *El* is a noun found either as a proper name or as an appellative throughout the whole range of the Semitic peoples; further, it belongs to the most ancient stock of the languages and, unlike *Baal*, which we shall consider next, was a term applied only to gods, never to men. Should we go further and hold with Lagrange that it was originally a proper name of God and that the fact of its later becoming an appellative

<sup>1</sup>See the reproduction in Lagrange, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>See Dr. G. A. Cooke's *Text-Book of North Semitic Inscriptions*, 1903, pp. 159 ff. Cp. line 2. "There stood by me the god(?) Hadad and El . . ."

<sup>3</sup>Dussaud and Macler, *Voyage archéologique à Safâ*, 1901, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>P. Dhorme, *Les Semites*, p. 134 in *Où en est l'Histoire des Religions*, t. i., 1911.

is due to "the multiplication of persons to whom His transcendental properties were attributed"?<sup>1</sup> The thesis has been attacked with some vehemence by the eminent Assyriologist, Fr. Deimel, S.J., in *Verbum Domini*.<sup>2</sup> A more studied criticism is that of Dr. Johannes Hehn, of the Catholic faculty of Würzburg.<sup>3</sup> There is a somewhat superficial group of arguments against Lagrange in Prof. A. Lod's *Israel from the beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century*.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Dr. Stephen Langdon, the Professor of Assyriology at Oxford, writes: "The Semitic word for God meant originally 'He who is High', a sky god; and here also I believe that their religion began with monotheism; they probably worshipped El, Ilah, as their first deity."<sup>5</sup>

It is at least arguable that the alternative view that "among the heathen Semites the universal Godhead was developed out of the multiplicity of separate divinities"<sup>6</sup> is open to still graver objections, and that Lagrange's hypothesis remains the best existing interpretation of the facts. It is perhaps a somewhat academic dispute, since it does not contradict the fact that the Semitic religions *as we meet with them in the texts* were polytheistic. Further, on it depends not the general question of primitive monotheism, but merely the question whether the Semitic religions fell away from a high ideal or, on the contrary, never succeeded in attaining to one without the aid of divine revelation.

2. BAAL.—The second principal title for divinities, which is certainly primitive, proto-Semitic and found in all the Semitic languages, is Baal. The meaning is "possessor," "owner," "lord," and, unlike *El*, it is applied not only to gods but to men. It is variously used to designate the

<sup>1</sup>*Op. cit.* p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>Vol. 8, fasc. i., Jan. 1928, pp. 17-21. Deimel is somewhat over-impressed by the Assyro-Babylonian evidence and pays insufficient attention to the W. and S. Semitic texts.

<sup>3</sup>*Die biblische und die babylonische Gottesidee*, Leipzig, 1913, pp. 150-213. See *Revue Biblique*, 1913, pp. 154-6, and Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-5.

<sup>4</sup>English trans. by Dr. S. H. Hooke, London, 1932, pp. 253-56.

<sup>5</sup>*Semitic Mythology*, 1931, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup>Hehn, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

possessor of physical objects, of physical characteristics, of mental qualities, and so forth. Thus the *baal* of a house is its owner, a *baal* of hair is a hairy man,<sup>1</sup> a *baal* of the tongue is an eloquent man. - So too a married man is said to be the *baal*, *i.e.*, the lord, of a wife. It was not, however, in general use for the master of a slave or for one who exercised rule or authority over others. The precise idea, as Lagrange writes<sup>2</sup> is "neither real ownership nor personal ownership, but real domination." He excellently compares it to the rights of a feudal lord—the title to personal service arising out of the ownership of real property.

Thus it was a word in common use among the Canaanites, Aramaeans, and Arabs for the god of a particular locality, "the master of the house" in a particular district. Hence in the so-called Panammu inscription from Zenzirli,<sup>3</sup> the god Rekub-el is called "master of the house", *i.e.*, probably of the temple. Very frequently it is combined with the name of a place, a mountain, etc., and so *Baal Hermôn* is the Baal worshipped on Mt. Hermon and *Baal Sidôn* is the god of Sidon. But, as one might expect after seeing the various meanings of *baal*, the use is not restricted to localities. The *Baal Marqod* is not the god of a place, but the *baal* of dancing; *Baal-zebul* or Beelzebub is the lord of flies, who drives them away or summons them according to his pleasure.

We may accept the position that the local use is the most familiar one and that often the *baal* of a district replaces, as a generic term, a proper name that is frequently unknown to us. Every city had its own *baal* and for this reason the Old Testament refers to the *baalim* or *baals* in the plural.

Yet there is abundant evidence for the further use of *baal* as a proper name. "In the Amarna letters," writes Prof. Cook<sup>4</sup> "Baal proper corresponds to Addu (or Hadad), and in Egyptian texts (especially of the thirteenth century), Baal is known as a war-god,

<sup>1</sup>IV. Kings i. 8. Or perhaps, in this context, a wearer of a hairy mantle.

<sup>2</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup>See Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 171-80. Here, p. 175, line 22.

<sup>4</sup>*Religion of the Semites*, 3rd ed., p. 532.



causing terror and associated with the mountains." As regards Arabia, it was the opinion of Nöldeke<sup>1</sup> that there is evidence for the former worship of a god named Baal, even though later Arabs were unaware of it. Of Babylonia a competent authority has written : " . . . . In Babylonia *Bēl* became the name of an individual god in a way that was never true of *Ba'al* among the West Semites."<sup>2</sup> It may also be observed that the god Hadad, who always replaces Baal in the Amarna letters, was the supreme god of Syria and was, in a special sense, the storm god ; further, that in cuneiform script the sign with the syllabic value IM is used with the ideographic value of both Addu (*i.e.*, Hadad) and *Rammān*, the Thunderer.<sup>3</sup> So the equation : (A particular) Baal=Addu=Hadad=Rammān, appears to be fully justified by the texts and we may see in Baal, under this formality, a god of the heavens (Baal Shamem), a storm god, Baal *par excellence*.

If, from these uses of Baal or its equivalent as a proper name, we cannot draw an absolutely peremptory conclusion as to the existence, originally, of a supreme Baal of whom the local *baalim* were later differentiations,<sup>4</sup> our argument does, at least, vitiate Robertson Smith's attempt to tether, as it were, the *baal* to the soil and to represent him as a local god of natural fertility, a waterer of the crops and little else.<sup>5</sup>

These gods or *baalim* were not, it may be argued, merely local deities, but were sky gods, whose office it was, in the eyes of their clients, to watch over particular localities from their habitation in the heavens. This is, it must be confessed, far removed from ethical monotheism ; it is equally remote from crude animism or polydaemonism.

<sup>1</sup>Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, art. Arabs (Ancient), vol. i., p. 664.

<sup>2</sup>Art. Baal in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, by Dr. L. Paton, vol. ii., p. 296.

<sup>3</sup>See Mercer's *Assyrian Grammar*, 1921, pp. 105-6.

<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 89 ff. Dr. Hehn rejects this hypothesis uncompromisingly. " (It) is a theory not based upon actual historical fact." *Op. cit.*, p. 121. Yet Père Vincent, certainly no inconsiderable authority, has written fairly recently : " No decisive argument has set aside this interpretation. It is noteworthy that an analogous judgment can be passed regarding Egypt." See *Revue Biblique*, 1928, p. 533, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup>*Religion of the Semites*, pp. 93 ff. Prof. Cook in his notes on *Baal*, pp. 532-6, allows that : " W.R.S.'s pages have been found to need some modification." Unfortunately his own view is often far from clear.

3. MELEK (ALSO MOLECH AND MILK).—"There can be no doubt that 'Lord' and 'King' are favourite synonyms for 'God,' and that the conceptions of lordship and of kingship constitute the most essentially decisive factor (*das wesentlichste Moment*) in the idea of God among the Semitic peoples."<sup>1</sup> We have already discussed the Semitic conception of "lord." Something must now be said about the divine King or kings.

For the Semites the god was not only *baal* or lord; he was also *melek* or king, as we may judge from the name of the Tyrian baal, Melqart, whose name represents a contracted form of *Melek-qiryath*, i.e., king of the city. "King" began as a common name for "god," but later it became the name of a particular god, "though the character of this god is difficult to grasp, doubtless because it was not everywhere the same."<sup>2</sup>

He is most clearly recognizable among the Ammonites in the case of Milkom, who was their national god, as Chemos was the national god of Moab, and who had a sanctuary near Jerusalem, built by Solomon for one of his pagan wives.<sup>3</sup>

The root also stands in the Hebrew Bible for a god MLK, the consonants of whose name were pointed by the Massoretes with the vowels of *bosheth*, "shameful thing," and so gave the reading Molech (in the Septuagint, Moloch). It is probable that the real pronunciation varied from time to time and that the name is best represented by the Hebrew *melek* or the Phœnician *milk*.

We must not ignore the fact that the name is to be remarked in many passages of the Old Testament<sup>4</sup> as a title of Jahweh (Jehovah) the God of Israel, though here, it would seem, it is always used appellatively. Evidence for this latter statement is to be found in the ancient theophorous names, such as Ahimelek (=the (divine) king is brother.)<sup>5</sup> At a later date, i.e., from the eighth century onwards, *Milk*

<sup>1</sup>Hehn, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup>Lagrange, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>III. Kings xi. 5. The Douay version, following the Septuagint, reads "Moloch."

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Deut. xxxiii. 5; I. Kings xii. 22.

<sup>5</sup>See the late Dr. G. Buchanan Gray's *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names*, pp. 146 ff.

(Moloch) occurs in the Bible as the name of a particular deity, but he is a pagan divinity, whose worship is inseparably associated with the abomination of human sacrifices.

Such sacrifices were regarded by the Hebrews as Canaanite institutions, though the relatively late date of the Moloch cult may indicate a non-Canaanite origin. In any case, the god was worshipped in many places outside Canaan proper, for example at Byblos, at Tyre, and in the island of Cyprus. By classical authors he was assimilated to Kronos, the god who sacrificed his son, and it has been plausibly conjectured<sup>1</sup> that he corresponded in Babylonia to Nergal, the god of the underworld, whose character was necessarily sinister, since he peopled his dominions mainly by the agencies of pestilence, famine, and war.

The cruelties associated with child-sacrifice, which involved the burning of the victims alive, are sometimes explained in the light of Milk's alleged character as god of the underworld. M. Louis Desnoyers<sup>2</sup> is not satisfied with this interpretation. He points out that the victims could have been despatched to the lower regions without such a refinement of torture; hence, he is disposed to regard Milk "at least in remote times, as a sort of fire-god."

This special emphasis on Milk as a god of atrocious cruelty should not obscure the primitive significance of the title MLK, which did no more than point to the god's surpassing dignity not only as Baal, but as King. The notion of human sacrifice in honour of the King-god came later and marked a perversion, not a deepening, of the original conception.

4. GODS AS PARENTS OR RELATIVES OF MANKIND.—Side by side with the three great divine titles of El, Baal and Melek, we find in the Semitic languages terms used purely as appellatives and expressing relationship or filiation in regard of the gods. So, among Phœnician names we have *Ab-Baal*, "Baal is father"; *Bath-Baal*, "daughter of Baal"; *Aħath-Melqart*, "sister of Melqart." A people was called the sons or daughters of a god; the terms father,

<sup>1</sup>Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>2</sup>*Histoire du peuple hébreu*, 1922, t. i., p. 255.

brother, uncle, and the rest "replace a divine name as a species of customary synonym that everyone recognizes."<sup>1</sup>

The facts are admitted ; the question to be decided is : Are these terms indicative of *natural* filiation or of filiation in a *metaphorical* sense? A number of scholars would answer that they indicate *natural* filiation, or blood relationship, but whereas some would trace the origin of the idea to *veneration for ancestors*, which resulted finally in their deification, and an ensuing relationship with the gods, others (in particular the English and Scottish scholars, T. K. Cheyne, G. Buchanan Gray, and W. Robertson Smith) turn for an explanation to *totemism*, that is, to a system connected with human kinship with animals.

We shall have more to say regarding Robertson Smith's totemistic conception when we come to consider sacrifice. Meanwhile, it may be premised that : "Totemism has been defined as the cult of a social group, especially an exogamous one (*i.e.*, one in which custom compels a man to marry outside the tribe), which stands to a species of animal or plant (generally edible), or to an object or class of objects, in an intimate relationship ; the totem is treated as a cognate to be respected, and not to be eaten or used, or at least only under certain restrictions."<sup>2</sup> According to Robertson Smith's view, a complete proof of early totemism in a race or tribe involves establishing : (i.) that there were certain stocks named after animals and plants ; (ii.) that the members of a stock traced their origin to such a plant or animal and considered themselves to be of the same family ; (iii.) that the totem animal or plant was regarded, if not as the god of the stock, at least with veneration, so that the totem animal would not ordinarily be eaten.<sup>3</sup> Ordinarily, totemism is associated with *matriarchy*, *i.e.*, the condition of affairs where descent, kinship, and succession are reckoned through the distaff or maternal side, with its pendant, *exogamy*, which is mentioned above. Now it will be seen that numbers (ii.) and (iii.) are the crucial points for, unless it can be shown that there was a belief in a community of origin of men and animals *and* a marked veneration for the totem animal, the theory cannot stand. And this is precisely what cannot be proved, either as regards the Semites or as anything approaching a universal principle. Competent authorities assert that neither totemism nor

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<sup>1</sup>Lagrange, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup>See S. A. Cook, following W. H. Rivers, in *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 535, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup>See his *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, 1st et., Cambridge, 1885, p. 188. Also *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 124 and *passim*.

exogamy was found among the Semitic peoples,<sup>1</sup> or, for that matter, among the Indo-Europeans; that it is not uniform in its incidence, so that it is more correct to speak, in the plural, of totemisms; that its religious character is extremely doubtful, since in the words of Sir James Frazer, its chief chronicler: "Pure totemism is not in itself a religion at all; for the totems as such are not worshipped, they are in no sense deities, they are not propitiated with prayer and sacrifice."<sup>2</sup> Finally, it is not primitive, since "the presence of 'high gods' among the totemist peoples seems to contraindicate the priority of totemism, as it does that of animism or of magic."<sup>3</sup>

Hence, when faced by a choice between a wholly uncertain hypothesis of *natural* kinship and a perfectly intelligible *metaphor*, we have no hesitation in choosing the latter, in which the ideas of Master and King give place to the more familiar and intimate "Father." Yet since, among the Semites, the bare word "Father" did not of itself suffice to designate God, we may well believe that: "The feeling of tenderness which supposes so perfect a knowledge of the infinite Goodness was only to develop completely among men when He who was Son revealed to us the Father."<sup>4</sup>

5. THE GODDESSES ASHÊRÂ AND ASTARTE.—A summary list of the chief Semitic deities would not be of much service. It may, however, be of interest to mention two of the principal goddesses, since in Canaan at least: "Almost all the gods of the past seem to have become Baals; almost all the goddesses became 'Ashêrâs or Astartes.'"<sup>5</sup>

Of 'Ashêrâ it is sufficient to say that the word in the Hebrew Bible stands for two things: (i.) a sacred post or pole representing the goddess; and (ii.) the goddess herself. The former will be mentioned under sacred objects. The name of the goddess may mean "the Happy" or the "Dispenser of Happiness." The attempt of Robertson Smith<sup>6</sup> to question the existence of such a goddess is admitted by Dr. Cook to have been ill-considered. The inscriptions prove conclusively the cult of such a goddess in Babylonia, Arabia,

<sup>1</sup>See Père Pinard de la Boullaye, S.J.: *L'Etude comparée des Religions*, 3rd ed., 1929, t. i., pp. 403-9. Also for a succinct account and criticism, Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, pp. 103-9.

<sup>2</sup>*Totemism and Exogamy*, 1910-11, vol. iv., p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Pinard de la Boullaye, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup>Desnoyers, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>6</sup>*Religion of the Semites*, p. 188; see also pp. 560-62.

Canaan and elsewhere, though she seems to have been chiefly a West Semitic deity. From the time of the Amarna letters (c. 1450-1350 B.C.) a confusion arose between 'Ashêrâ and Astarte, so that in the Biblical literature the name survives mainly as an epithet of the great Canaanite goddess, Astarte.

*Astarte*, who is at once the oldest and the greatest of all Semitic goddesses, has a name of uncertain etymology, which equates with the Babylonian Ishtar, the Ashtar Chemos of the Moabites, the Atar (=Atargatis) of the Aramæans and the god Athtar of South Arabia. The Massorettes vocalized her name, as in the case of Moloch, with the vowels of *bosheth*, so making "Ashtoreth." By the Greeks she was called Aphrodite. Her three chief characteristics are (i.) she is a goddess of unbridled sexual love; (ii.) she is a goddess of maternity and fruitfulness; (iii.) she is a war-goddess.<sup>1</sup> Under the first heading we must mention, most unwillingly, the practice of sacred prostitution, both male and female, in her honour which, with human sacrifice, constitutes the two unforgivable elements in Semitic religion. That such an institution had a religious character and did not exist simply for sensual gratification is proved among other things by the special words *qâdêsh* (m.) and *qedêshâ* (f.), implying consecration, which distinguished the addicts from the ordinary *zônâ* or public woman. In a polygamous society, where ordinary prostitution was rife, this has its significance. The countless images of Astarte, varying from developed sculptures of the goddess, usually naked and often with the hands supporting the breasts, to conventional plaques roughly portraying the Queen of Heaven,<sup>2</sup> bear witness to the popularity of this goddess of abounding life and luxuriant fertility.

The exact relation between the Baals and the goddesses in Canaan is difficult to determine. The Bible frequently mentions them together, but it is not clear whether the Canaanites *habitually* regarded them as consorts. If one takes into account the Ashtar Chemos of the Moabites and the words of Hammurabi's dedication,

<sup>1</sup>See the article "Ashtart (Ashtoreth) Astarte," by the late Dr. L. Paton in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii., pp. 115-18.

<sup>2</sup>For illustrations see Prof. R. A. S. Macalister's *A History of Civilization in Palestine*, 1921, p. 91.

in which 'Ashêrâ is called "bride of the king of heaven," it is probable that they were. But, if Astarte was a consort, she did not necessarily take second place. At Byblos she was superior to El; at Sidon to the Baal.<sup>1</sup> Again, the goddess 'Anath, who is often associated with Astarte in Egyptian texts as the two "great goddesses who conceive but do not bear" is at least on a level with her illustrious consort Mekal, the Baal of Bethshan.<sup>2</sup>

## HOLINESS AND UNCLEANNESS

From the Semitic representations, however imperfect, of the Holy One who is God, we turn naturally to the ideas of holiness as contrasted with that of ritual uncleanness, that are frequently found in the Bible and among Semitic peoples. "Though not precise," the distinction between what is holy and what is unclean is real; in rules of holiness the motive is respect for the gods, in rules of uncleanness it is primarily fear of an unknown or hostile power."<sup>3</sup>

Among the Semites a clear distinction was made between what was permitted, licit or profane (*halâl*) and what was forbidden, restricted and sacred (*ḥarâm*).<sup>4</sup> "Things are either sacred and holy or common and profane; they are also divided into either clean or unclean."<sup>5</sup> The principal interrelations are (i.) that the *clean* and profane can become sacred; (ii.) that the *unclean* and profane cannot become sacred; (iii.) that the sacred can become unclean, "and even ought to become so in another and exclusive religion, since all that is sacred in a cult is necessarily an abomination to those who condemn it."<sup>6</sup>

The close association of the two ideas "holy" and "unclean" must not blind us to their essential distinction. True, they are

<sup>1</sup>See Desnoyers, *op. cit.*, p. 256, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup>For 'Anath, see Vincent in *Revue Biblique*, 1928, pp. 512-43, art. "Le Ba'al Cananéen de Beisan et sa Parèdre." Also S. A. Cook in *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology*, 1930, pp. 104-5.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson Smith: *Religion of the Semites*, p. 153.

<sup>4</sup>Hence the *ḥarâm* or *harem* is the "forbidden" or "reserved" part of the house or tent, *i.e.*, the women's quarters. So also the *Ḥarâm* at Jerusalem, Hebron, etc., is the temple-area, the sacred enclosure.

<sup>5</sup>S. A. Cook in *Religion of the Semites*, p. 548.

<sup>6</sup>Lagrange, p. 152.

correlative terms and have certain things in common, *e.g.*, neither is to be explained on purely natural grounds. So the prohibition of swine-flesh among the Israelites is not simply a registration of the fact that the pig is an unclean feeder. Further, in both cases there is an element of reserve and avoidance, since the fear of putting holy things to a profane use is closely paralleled by the fear of contracting some physical or moral impurity by contact with a corpse or by the use of unclean meats. Finally, in both cases there is some risk of "contagion." Hence the earthen vessel that has served for the baked meats must be broken<sup>1</sup> as though it had contracted impurity. In Ezech. xliv. 19 it is ordained that the priests must exchange their sacred vestments, after the sacrifice, for ordinary garments, in order "that they sanctify not the people with their garments" by communicating to them a holiness for which ransom would have to be paid.

Yet, as has been said, the distinction is essential. Underlying the conception of uncleanness is the largely negative element of avoidance of something hurtful, *because it is hurtful*; under that of holiness, the conception of respect for the rights of the deity in using things that pertain to him. On the analogy of habitual grace and mortal sin, the two elements, holiness and uncleanness, cannot co-exist in the same subject, for one will cast out the other.

## SACRED THINGS AND PLACES

1. SACRED SPRINGS.—It is unnecessary to stress the fact that, throughout the Semitic world, springs, fountains, and rivers were often the object of cultus. Even the sea, though regarded rather as a part of the visible universe than as something with intrinsic qualities, had its gods. At Jôra, near Askalon, there was a vernal procession from the temple to the sea in honour of the goddess Atargatis, whose statue was immersed; at Dôr (Tantureh) there appears to have been a cult of a Poseidon-like deity.<sup>2</sup>

Yet there is no sufficient proof of Robertson Smith's dictum that: "The source itself is honoured as a divine being, I had almost said a divine animal."<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, the source had no priests, no temples and no sacrifices offered to it. It is more correct to say that living water as the principle of life and energy in plants, and as the essential drink of men and animals, was regarded as a marvellous effect wrought by a superior agency. "They saw in it the action of a higher power, without distinguishing between natural and super-

<sup>1</sup>Lev. vi. 28; cp. xi. 33-35; xv. 12.

<sup>2</sup>See S. A. Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology*, pp. 172-4.

<sup>3</sup>*Religion of the Semites*, p. 184.



natural."<sup>1</sup> Among the chief rites were those of taking sacred objects, such as statues, down to the water for a rite of purification, and of bringing water from the source for the purpose of libations, symbolical of rain.

2. SACRED TREES.—Robertson Smith allows that : " There is no reason to think that any of the greater Semitic cults was developed out of tree-worship."<sup>2</sup> But from the observation that " no Canaanite high place was complete without its sacred tree standing beside the altar," and from the allegation that " the direct cult of trees was familiar to all the Semites," he judges that " some elements of tree worship entered into the ritual even of such deities as in their origin were not tree-gods." Actually, he seems here to go a good deal further than the facts warrant. If one is prepared to distinguish popular superstition from serious religious cultus, it may be claimed that the Semites did not worship trees, though trees were often accessories in their worship in the sense that they formed part of the ordinary Semitic sanctuary. The attempted proof of Canaanite tree worship from the Bible is quite inadequate. It is indifferent logic to argue from the statement that " the altars were habitually set up ' under green trees ' " to the conclusion that the trees themselves were an object of worship !

An interesting question concerns the 'ashêrâ, or sacred pole, which was a regular feature of the Semitic enclosure. It is translated by the Septuagint and Vulgate as " grove,"<sup>3</sup> but it is commonly admitted that, at least in its more ordinary form, it was a post symbolizing a tree rather than a living tree rooted in the ground. It may be regarded as a tree-trunk, deprived of its upper branches and lopped off short, as in the bas-relief found at Susa by the de Morgan expedition.<sup>4</sup> Ordinarily there would only have been one in each sanctuary, but in the Susa representation there are three. How far, that is to what degree of perfection, the image of the goddess 'Ashêrâ was usually carved on the post, cannot be determined with certainty. Nor is it easy to arrive at the precise relation between the 'ashêrâ and the goddess, who gave her name to it. It does not seem probable that the 'ashêrâ was an epitome of the primordial sacred grove,<sup>5</sup> since in many sanctuaries there were trees, rooted in the soil, to which the name 'ashêrâ would have been more suitably applied ; nor are we justified in holding that it was an idol as a direct object of worship, for it was honoured not under its own name, but under that of the goddess. Perhaps, as M. Desnoyers has suggested,<sup>6</sup> it is best regarded as one of the survivals of an ancient

<sup>1</sup>Lagrange, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>*E.g.*, IV. Kings xxi. 7 ; III. Kings xvi. 33 ; xiv. 23.

<sup>4</sup>See illustration in Père Vincent's *Canaan d'après l'Exploration récente*, 1907, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup>Vincent, p. 132.

<sup>6</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 234, n. 1.

ritual practice (not fully appreciated by its later devotees?), unless with Lagrange<sup>1</sup> one elects to consider it as primarily "an image of the goddess, whose head was perhaps no more than sketched in outline, and whose body was a stake driven into the ground."

3. SACRED STONES.—This is a big subject. For our purpose the essential distinction is one between stones that are *representative* and stones that are merely *commemorative* or votive. The former, though not ordinarily carved in representation of any recognizable image, were held to symbolize and "contain" the god in whose honour they were erected. They differed from the sacred fountain and sacred trees, because, while the latter "are common symbols at sanctuaries, but . . . are not invariably found," the former are "the ordinary artificial mark of a Semitic sanctuary."<sup>2</sup> In Arabia and elsewhere they tend to take the place of an *altar*; the victim was slain beside them and his blood was poured out over the stones. After a sacrifice "the primitive rite of sprinkling or dashing the blood against the altar, or allowing it to flow down on the ground at its base, was hardly ever omitted."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in addition to these sacred stones or *betyls*<sup>4</sup> with a representative character, there are others which seem to be merely *commemorative*, set up as funerary monuments, or votive tablets, erected in thanksgiving for some benefit conferred by the god.

There are excellent examples of both sorts of stone in the Semitic sanctuary at Gezer, where one of the stones in the line of pillars<sup>5</sup> is commonly regarded as a *betyl*; it has been polished to a fine gloss by the contact of innumerable lips or of "hands soaked for purposes of anointing in blood or some other liquid offered in homage or in sacrifice to a god."<sup>6</sup> But there are also other pillars in the same alinement<sup>7</sup> which are more suitably regarded as commemorative, as

<sup>1</sup>p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson Smith, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup>Compare the Greek *battalos*, a meteorite; the Semitic *bait-il*, House of El.

<sup>5</sup>No. II. in Prof. Macalister's enumeration. Illustrations in Vincent, *Canaan*, pp. 110-14; S. R. Driver, *Modern Research as illustrating the Bible*, 1909, pp. 48 and 63.

<sup>6</sup>Vincent, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup>In all there are eight columns and two fragments; the former range in height from 10ft. 6in. to 5ft. 5in.

monuments set up in memory of the dead, that they might not be wholly forgotten among men. So it was that Absalom "in his life time had taken and reared up for himself the pillar which is in the king's dale : for he said : I have no son to keep my name in remembrance : and he called the pillar after his own name."<sup>1</sup> In like manner a Phœnician inscription from Kition, in Cyprus, commemorates Abd-osir who writes of himself : " I set up (this) pillar in my lifetime over my resting-place for ever."<sup>2</sup> Yet not all pillars of this kind were funerary. Many were votive tablets resembling those found in such quantities on the site of ancient Carthage,<sup>3</sup> which commemorated some favour received from the god or bestowed by men.

The theory that *all* such pillars [called in Hebrew *maṣṣēbā*, pl. *maṣṣēbōth*, i.e., standing (stone)] were representative abodes of the god is unwarranted, though it must be admitted that in certain cases there was some shifting of values.<sup>4</sup>

4. THE SACRED ENCLOSURE.—We have just considered some of the chief elements that went to the making of a Semitic sanctuary. We must now take a more general view of it. The Semitic conception was that of a sacred enclosure which was, at one and the same time, " the house of God and His inviolable domain. Thus He was established among men without any loss of dignity."<sup>5</sup> The form and extent of the enclosure varied from one people to another. In Babylonia, where the population was largely urban, the sanctuary was set up among the houses of the town and was the temple enclosure, marked off by its high tower or *ziggurat*. Among the Phœnicians, the open-air type of sanctuary is found wherever their influence penetrated, though they had no special name for it.<sup>6</sup> In Arabia, the sanctuary had much wider limits so that " the *hima*

<sup>1</sup>III. Kings xviii. 18, in Revised Version.

<sup>2</sup>See Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 61 ff.

<sup>3</sup>See Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup>See Lagrange, pp. 197–210. Vincent, pp. 67 and 425 : S. A. Cook in *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 568–71. The two sanctuaries at Gezer have respectively ten and four columns ; Beth-Shemesh has five ; Taanakh has only two. The orientation of the lines of columns at Gezer and Megiddo is north—south ; at Tell es-Şāfiyē it is east—west.

<sup>5</sup>Lagrange, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup>Lagrange, p. 183.

sometimes enclosed a great tract of pasture land roughly marked off by pillars or cairns, and the *ḥarām* or sacred territory of Mecca extends for some hours' journey on almost every side of the city."<sup>1</sup>

As a typical Canaanite high place<sup>2</sup> and the most complete one in existence, we may instance Gezer in South Palestine, where stands the impressive series of eight enormous monoliths which has already been mentioned. In addition to these, there was found, between pillars V and VI, a large block of stone containing a hollow, which is identified by Vincent as an altar on which the sacrificial victim was placed, so that its blood ran down into the cavity and was easily gathered up for the purpose of anointing the adjacent *betyl*.<sup>3</sup>

More ordinarily, it may well be, the altar was of the type shown in the Susa bas-relief<sup>4</sup> or in the Petra high place, *i.e.*, a high structure with one or more steps leading up to it and furnished with horns of the type often mentioned in the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

In the sanctuary there were also one or more *'ashêrîm*, which, it would seem, were ordinarily fixed in the ground, even in cases where the nature of the soil would have favoured the growth of living trees.

In default of a natural spring, which supplied water for lustrations and other ceremonial cleansings, reservoirs were made in the neighbourhood of the sanctuary<sup>6</sup> or, failing this, water was conveyed to the spot in large earthenware jars.

One need only notice, in addition, the trenches to contain the ashes

<sup>1</sup>Robertson Smith, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>In Hebrew, *bāmā*, pl. *bāmōth*.

<sup>3</sup>*Canaan*, pp. 134-5. Macalister's original suggestion that it was an *'ashêrā* socket does not appear probable. See the *Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund*, 1903, p. 31; Vincent, pp. 131-2.

<sup>4</sup>Vincent, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup>*E.g.*, III. Kings i. 50; ii. 28; Ex. xxix. 12. The horns were probably symbolic of the horns of the sacrificial animal and indicative of the perpetual character of sacrifice. See Desnoyers, p. 233, n. 1. For other forms of altar, see Barton, G. A., art. "Altar (Semitic)" in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, i., pp. 350-54.

<sup>6</sup>Three are to be observed in the plan of the Canaanite high place at Gezer.

and other remains of the victims ; also, in the more important sanctuaries, the small temples sometimes referred to at a later date,<sup>1</sup> a chamber for sacrificial meals ; sleeping quarters for the priests who lived there and for the sacred prostitutes who came there at least on the occasions of great feasts.<sup>2</sup>

Of the furniture of such sanctuaries little remains. Much of it, doubtless, was perishable or easily destructible. Among objects of interest, found in Canaan, one may instance the Israelite altar or incense burner from Taanakh, which is dated conjecturally 700-600 B.C.<sup>3</sup>

The question of foundation and other sacrifices will be treated under "Sacrifice."

### SACRED SEASONS

"The word 'feast' has become for us synonymous with that of a day of rejoicing. It was not so in antiquity. A feast day was a day consecrated to a god."<sup>4</sup> It was a day of rest, which brought to an end a period of work ; further it was a day entirely dedicated to the god and, as such, carried with it sacrifice, invocations, and processions.

Among nomad peoples, such as the Arabs, feast-days were in the nature of pilgrimages, of visits to the great sanctuaries. Since distances were often great and not seldom a visit to a great sanctuary involved passing through enemy territory, it became the custom to proclaim a truce of God during the festival period ; it was an occasion for barter and commerce between tribes ; hence feasts took on the character of fairs. The essential rite among the nomads was the procession, particularly the circumambulatory procession, and the very word "Hadj," now commonly reserved for the Meccan pilgrimage, has the meaning "to go round an object with some solemnity." This rite had its pendant among the Hebrews in certain of their feasts, in particular that of Tabernacles, in which it was customary to walk in procession, carrying branches of trees. Such processions and the circuit of the altar or sanctuary were the central rites. In the spring time there was a celebration

<sup>1</sup>III. Kings xiii. 32, "the houses of the high places" ; IV. Kings xvii. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Desnoyers, pp. 235-6.

<sup>3</sup>Vincent, pp. 180-81 ; *Revue Biblique*, 1926, p. 492.

<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, p. 183.

of a sort of first-fruits solemnity, in which the first-born of domestic animals played a part. There was not, however, the custom among the nomads, as there was among the Hebrews, of sacrificing the first-born. There was another great feast and fair that lasted two months, *i.e.*, from the beginning of July till the end of August.

In Phœnicia the best-known feast was that of Aphrodite, which was celebrated in the month of July by the people of Byblos at Apheca, the modern Afqa, the grotto sacred to Adonis. It had the character of a mourning rite, and bewailed the death of the young god, whose tomb was located in the vicinity. Scarcely less famous was the feast of Herakles at Tyre. At Carthage the coming of Roman rule in 146 B.C. put an end to human sacrifices, but failed to check the generally immoral worship of the Great Goddess. Among the Syrians the great feast was held at Hierapolis (the modern Membig, 20 miles north-east of Aleppo), where living victims (sheep, goats and other animals) were cast into the flames in honour of the Dea Syra, Astarte.

All these feasts, though widely different in character, had this much in common—that they were not historically commemorative as were the feasts of the Jewish church. A mythical origin was often invented for them; actually they were chiefly connected with the recurring seasons of the year.

## SACRED PERSONS

1. MINISTERS OF THE SANCTUARY.—Among the Arabs we must distinguish the civilized inhabitants of South Arabia, who had priests as sacrificers and even a high priest who was the eponym for the reckoning of years, from the nomads, who had no holocausts and whose sacrifices were not functions reserved to priests. They had only a guardian of the sanctuary, called a *sâdin*, who was also an unofficial judge in contentious matters.

Among the Aramæans the priest was called the *komer* (doubtless from *kamar*, “to be kindled” or “to blaze”) of a certain god and offered holocausts in his honour.

The double Phœnician inscription from Kition in Cyprus is a sort of salary list of those employed in the temple.<sup>1</sup> It refers to those

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<sup>1</sup>See Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 65–70. References here are to document A.

"who reside for the sacred service on this day"; to "sacrificers"; to "the barbers officiating at the service" of ceremonial shaving of the head and offering of hair; to the "masons," the "chief of the scribes," and "to dogs and temple clients."<sup>1</sup> An inscription found at Carthage by Père Delattre, in November 1901, suggests that there were several degrees in the priesthood.

2. PERSONAL CONSECRATION.—We cannot spend any time over personal dedication by *vow*, though this too was known among the Semites. We need only refer to consecration by the rite of *circumcision*. As regards its antiquity, Dr. G. A. Barton has declared: "A practice which is so nearly co-extensive with the Semitic world probably originated with the common stock from which the Semites are sprung."<sup>2</sup> Yet its complete absence among the Assyro-Babylonians is distinctly unfavourable to this view. In any case, it has been practised from time immemorial by most Semitic peoples, *e.g.*, the Arabs, the Edomites, the Ammonites and the Moabites.<sup>3</sup> There can be little doubt that it was a form of personal consecration by shedding of blood, usually performed either at puberty or just before marriage. Among the Hebrews it was commonly performed within a few days of birth.<sup>4</sup>

## SACRIFICE

Sacrifice is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as: "Primarily the slaughter of an animal (often including the subsequent consumption of it by fire) as an offering to God or a deity. Hence, in wider sense, the surrender to God or a deity, for the purpose of propitiation or homage, of some object or possession." The second sentence is highly important, since the narrower sense, involving the immolation of an animate victim, could not be verified in the case of all Semitic sacrifices; further, it emphasizes the generic idea of sacrifice, which is that of a *gift*, offered to God or a deity for the sake of entering into union with Him, of averting His wrath, of tendering to Him adoration and thanks. For the Semite, the *betyl* enshrining the presence of the god did not suffice; an altar was required to receive his gifts since "a complete act of worship implies not merely

<sup>1</sup>The "dogs" are frequently interpreted to mean temple prostitutes. See Deut. xxiii. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Art. "Circumcision (Semitic)" in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iii., p. 679.

<sup>3</sup>Jer. ix. 25-26. For the modern rite among the Qaraites of South Arabia, see Bertram Thomas's *Arabia Felix*, 1932, pp. 71-72.

<sup>4</sup>Gen. xvii. 10-12.

that the worshipper comes into the presence of his god with gestures of homage and words of prayer, but also that he lays before the deity some material oblation."<sup>1</sup>

With Robertson Smith<sup>2</sup> we may divide the Semitic sacrifices under three headings. Under the third heading we shall have to consider that aspect of sacrifice which is at once his most original and his most debatable contribution to the subject.

1. We must distinguish between *animal* and *vegetable* offerings, called by the Hebrews, respectively, *zebah* and *minha*. Naturally these vary in material among the Semites according to whether the offerers are a nomad or an agricultural people. So the Arabs offered oxen, camels, and sheep; for the last they sometimes economically substituted a gazelle. For the *minha* they offered wine, oil, and flour. The Canaanites, primarily an agricultural people, made offerings of oxen, calves, rams, goats, deer, and various kinds of birds; among vegetables they offered cereals, honey, oil, milk, and spiced wine. The absence of the camel is readily explained by the fact that they lived in settled communities. The Aramæans, who occupy an intermediate position in such matters, closely resembled the Hebrew ritual as regards the material of their sacrifices.

2. We distinguish also offerings merely set forth on a sacred table and offerings consumed by fire. Only in the latter case, evidently, is there a holocaust and unequivocal destruction of the victim. Apropos of the former it has been claimed that the "loaves of proposition" or show-bread<sup>3</sup> which were laid upon a table in the Israelite holy place, were a survival of an ancient belief that the god consumed the food set before him by worshippers, that sacrifice originated in a meal offered to the god.<sup>4</sup> Now it is certain, of course, that both in Israel and among the other Semites offerings of food that were not meant to be consumed by fire played a large part. In the list of religious offerings found at Carthage,<sup>5</sup> there is mention of "plants of fair fruit," of "bread," of "figs fair and white," and of "incense, fine frankincense" as part of the sacrificial offering. Yet the contention that sacrifice was regarded

<sup>1</sup>Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>p. 217.

<sup>3</sup>Ex. xxv. 30; xxxv. 13; xxxix. 36.

<sup>4</sup>See the *Babylonian Legend of the Deluge*, ll. 160-162, British Museum publication, 1929, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup>See Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 125-30.



*primarily* as a meal of which the god eat his share does not bear much examination. "If sacrifice had been only a culinary procedure to give nourishment to famished gods, it would never have had any place in religion."<sup>1</sup>

In the Semitic world, as Robertson Smith allows: "The idea that the gods actually consume the solid food deposited at their shrines is too crude to subsist without modification beyond the savage state of society."<sup>2</sup> True, he thinks that *liquid* oblations were regarded as consumed, but he has to admit that the drinking by the deity of the most important effusion (that of blood) is not well attested among the Semites. "Apart from Ps. l. [Vulg. xlix.] 13, the direct evidence for this is somewhat scanty so far as the Semites are concerned. . . ."<sup>3</sup> In any event, the theory is not an adequate explanation of the world-wide phenomenon of sacrifice, though it is useful in so far as it emphasizes "the fact that the material of sacrifices is always an object capable of being eaten or drunken."<sup>4</sup>

3. W. R. Smith finally distinguished sacrifices "in which the consecrated gift is wholly made over to the god, to be consumed on the altar or otherwise disposed of in his service," and those "at which the god and his worshippers partake together in the consecrated thing."<sup>5</sup> With the latter type, we touch the heart of his theory, since, in his conception, sacrifice is *primarily an act of communion*. The theory occupies the last six chapters of his work, *i.e.*, chs. vi.-xi.—well over 200 pages—and cannot be adequately summarized. Very briefly, he held that the totem-animal already mentioned,<sup>6</sup> which was of the same blood as gods and men, might not ordinarily be eaten. Yet, on certain solemn occasions, a gathering of the tribe took place, the

<sup>1</sup>Lagrange, p. 267. Personally, I would prefer the more qualified statement in the 1st (1903) edition of *Études sur les Religions Sémitiques*: "If sacrifice had been only a culinary procedure to give nourishment to the gods, it would have disappeared as soon as man arrived at a less debased conception of the gods." pp. 266-7.

<sup>2</sup>*Op. cit.*, pp. 228-9.

<sup>3</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, *loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>6</sup>"Gods as parents or relatives," above p. 10.

totem-animal was slain and the worshippers, by eating its flesh, entered into living and intimate union with the god.

This theory of totemistic communion has been severely handled and, outside the British Isles, it is almost everywhere recognized to be damaged beyond repair. Dr. Cook's efforts in his edition of the *Religion of the Semites* to cobble together the rags of the theory are unsuccessful. The most serious criticism is that it is unsupported by sufficient evidence, since the only instance of such "communion" adduced by Smith is that of "St. Nilus's camel," so-called because it occurs in the life of St. Nilus the hermit, which describes the slaughter and eating of a camel by Bedawin of the Sinai peninsula.<sup>1</sup> This instance, apart from its late date and certain ambiguities of expression, does nothing to prove that the camel was regarded as a god or that the eating of his flesh was a form of communion with the god.

In fact, in Foucart's words<sup>2</sup>: "As regards St. Nilus's camel, I am still of the opinion that it does not deserve to have so heavy a weight as the genesis of a part of the history of religion laid on its hump." And, as regards the whole problem, the most recent synthetic treatment of sacrifice<sup>3</sup> declares that "to erect an elaborate reconstruction of the theory of sacrifice on the basis of totemism is to build on very insecure foundations," and that "the totemistic hypothesis breaks down with the Robertson Smith theory of sacrifice." Dr. James rightly insists that the totemistic stage in the development of Israelite sacrifice is unproved. He continues: "Be this as it may, it certainly cannot now be maintained that 'originally all sacrifices were eaten by the worshippers,' and that 'in the oldest sacrifice the blood was drunk by the worshippers, and after it ceased to be drunk it was all poured out at the altar.'"<sup>4</sup>

Yet, here again, as Lagrange points out, this theory has its value since it lays stress upon "the idea of union

<sup>1</sup>Migne, P. G., lxxix., 612-13.

<sup>2</sup>*Histoire des religions et méthode comparative*, Paris, 1912, p. lxvi. : quoted by Schmidt, *Origin and Growth of Religion*, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Dr. E. O. James : *Origins of Sacrifice*, 1933, pp. 45 and 47.

<sup>4</sup>The quotation is from Robertson Smith, p. 389. I have corrected one or two slight misquotations in Dr. James.

with the god [which] is certainly a constitutive element of sacrifice."<sup>1</sup>

So we come back again to the idea of *offering*, which is undoubtedly the generic element in all sacrifices and which alone can group together sacrifices with blood and bloodless sacrifices. If we look for the fundamental idea underlying the offering, it seems to be that of recognizing the supreme dominion of God or the gods by handing back a part of the goods of this world, so that one may obtain the right to make use of the remainder and, as it were, to "desecrate" them for profane use.

Yet all offerings are not sacrifices, though all sacrifices are generically offerings. The specific difference lies in the concept of *immolation*, which is present, actually or equivalently, in all sacrifices, since even inanimate objects have to be destroyed in order to be offered in sacrifice. In any case, sacrifice truly and properly so-called was that of a living animal; other types of sacrifice were all ancillary to the main type. Nomads and agriculturalists had nothing more precious to offer than their domestic animals. The further conception of communion, of dining at the table of the god, is readily explained by the nature of the offering, the fact that it is in principle a free gift to the god on the part of his worshippers, and, above all, because "the invariable usage of the East is that great lords should feed their dependents."<sup>2</sup>

We have already referred to the most revolting of all types of sacrifice—that of human beings in honour, particularly, of the god Milk. Throughout the Semitic world—in Phœnicia and its colonies, in Syria, among the Aramæans, in Arabia and in Canaan, we find evidence ranging from bare traces of the practice to well-established and well-attested usage. The excavations at Gezer revealed "a cemetery of infants deposited in large earthenware jars. The infants were all newly-born, probably not more than a week old."<sup>3</sup> We know that the custom among the Canaanites of sacrificing the first-born is attested by the Bible (*e.g.*, IV. Kings iii. 27, Micheas vi. 7. III. Kings xvi. 34 is doubtful evidence).

In addition to sacrifices of children, a further specialized type of human sacrifice is that of *foundation* sacrifices, *i.e.*, "sacrifices

<sup>1</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 268.

<sup>2</sup>Lagrange, p. 272.

<sup>3</sup>S. R. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

offered at the foundation of a building, for the purpose of ensuring the stability of structure and the welfare of those about to occupy or use it."<sup>1</sup> So in one instance from Gezer, a jar-burial lay under a wall; at Megiddo the skeleton of a girl of fifteen was found buried under the western wall of the fortress; at Gezer again the remains of an old woman were dug out from the foundations of a house.<sup>2</sup> Two tendencies of a mitigating character are to be noted—that of substituting an animal in lieu of a human being,<sup>3</sup> and that of burying small figures of silver or other metal, or sometimes a lamp between two bowls, to take the place of a human victim.<sup>4</sup> Finally, there are at times signs of ritual mutilation of the bodies. At Gezer, for example, Prof. Macalister unearthed the upper half of a girl of about 15, buried in an old cistern among fourteen males, whose skeletons were whole and entire.<sup>5</sup>

In all these instances of sacrificial gifts and offerings we see an effort, however imperfect and distressing, to propitiate, to adore, to attain to union with the divinity. The hour was to come when "it would not be necessary to give to Him any other testimony than the heart's adoration in union with the sacrifice of God made man. But [in these studies] we are still far from this mystery, of which mere human nature could not have even an inkling."<sup>6</sup>

### THE DEAD

Before we consider the general manner of burial among the Semites and their attitude towards the next life, we must first ask: Did they regard *all* their dead as gods or was such deification reserved for a few? Did they pray *to* the dead or merely on their behalf? We know that Renan attempted to prove that, for practical purposes, the Semite showed no concern with regard to the question of a future existence.<sup>7</sup> We also know that a profound reaction has set in against this view and that many scholars are inclined to think that the Semite adored his dead as gods and offered sacrifice to them, as to those worthy of divine honours.

<sup>1</sup>Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>See Vincent, pp. 50 ff., p. 192, 196, and 199 ff. Note illustrations on pp. 192 and 197.

<sup>3</sup>For examples, see Driver, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>4</sup>See especially Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology*, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup>Cook, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup>Lagrange, p. 269.

<sup>7</sup>*Histoire du peuple d'Israel*, pp. 42 and 130.

In answer to these questions, it should be admitted that divine rank was attributed to certain of the *more illustrious* dead. The only Biblical passage adduced, that in which the witch of Endor speaks of Samuel's spirit as an *Elôhim*,<sup>1</sup> is unconvincing evidence of any godlike quality in the departed.<sup>2</sup> But inscriptions that have come to light in various parts of the Semitic world, notably in the Nabataean country round Petra, go to prove that *some* of the dead were regarded as gods. Nor is this a recent innovation in Semitic religion; it is found in Babylonia at a very early date.<sup>3</sup>

Yet there is nothing to show that in ordinary circumstances the dead had a claim to be divinized. Further, it may be observed that there is no one name for the dead among the Semites and of those that are known the etymology, while frequently uncertain, does not suggest a divine status. In the Bible and among the Phœnicians they are known as the Rephaim, which word is variously held to mean the "weak ones," the "terrible ones," the "wise ones," or, according to Père Lagrange's suggestion, the "healers." Whatever may be the real meaning, it is clear from the Phœnician inscriptions that it is a privilege to "have a resting place among the Rephaim" or shades.<sup>4</sup> The terms used in the Hadad monument from Zenjirli,<sup>5</sup> include the word *nephesh* or soul. "May the soul of Panammu eat with Hadad and may the soul of Panammu drink with Hadad." Whatever may be the precise sense of *nephesh* (and one would judge that a soul capable of eating and drinking would be of a somewhat material order) it is evident that the reference is to a principle distinct from the body, a principle not extinguished by death. The lack of philosophical exactness of expression among these eighth-century Aramæans does not obscure their recognition of a vital principle that survived the grave.

The ordinary Semitic method of disposing of the dead was burial. True, at Carthage and elsewhere, cremation was practised, but this was exceptional. An instance of both processes is furnished in I. Kings,<sup>6</sup> where it is related that the men of Jabes burned the corpses of Saul and his sons and then buried the bones. Other Scriptural examples<sup>7</sup> imply

<sup>1</sup>I. Kings xxviii. 13.

<sup>2</sup>See Lagrange, p. 316.

<sup>3</sup>See P. Dhorme: *La religion assyro-babylonienne*, 1910, pp. 166 ff.

<sup>4</sup>See Tabnith's inscription from Sidon in Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, p. 27, ii. 7-8, also Eshmun-azar's, p. 31, i. 8. The former reads: "And if thou do at all open me, and at all disquiet me, mayest thou have no seed among the living under the sun, nor resting place among the Rephaim."

<sup>5</sup>Cooke, pp. 159 ff., esp. ii., 21 ff.

<sup>6</sup>xxxi. 11-13.

<sup>7</sup>Jos. vii. 26; Amos ii. 1.

that the preservation of the body in the best possible condition was quite secondary by comparison with the actual rite of burial. At Gezer, though the burials often recalled the Egyptian style, there was no trace of the elaborate processes of embalming which were practised in Egypt from at least the second dynasty onwards. Burial among the Canaanites frequently took place in an underground cavern, whether natural or artificial; the bodies were arranged in the grotto in somewhat haphazard fashion, sometimes stretched out at full length, but more usually flexed to a greater or less degree with the knees drawn up towards the chin. In some instances, the more notable dead were fenced off behind an inner wall of stones in a corner of the sepulchre. There is good reason for thinking that a much simpler and less exclusive type of burial obtained in the case of the poorer inhabitants of the land.<sup>1</sup> Further, the excavations have proved that in Canaan there was a usage, analogous to that of Egypt, of placing near the body objects similar to those used by the deceased during life or, in many cases, small figures representing such objects. "Among the contents of Palestinian tombs are plates, knives, and vessels, with ashes, remains of animals—in one case a whole sheep for one man . . . and drink."<sup>2</sup> We need not assume from this usage that the Semites failed to recognise the vast difference between life on earth and life beyond the grave. But, knowing little with certainty regarding the conditions of that future life, they preferred to lay beside their dead the objects that were of proved value in the only life they had really experienced.<sup>3</sup>

Frequently in the inscriptions we meet with a desire or a threat on behalf of the deceased that he should not be disturbed in his last resting-place. We have already quoted Tabnith's words; those of Eshmun-'azar are equally striking. "I adjure every prince and every man that they open me not, nor uncover me, nor carry me from this resting-place, nor take away the coffin of my resting-place, lest these holy gods deliver them up, and cut off that prince and those men and

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<sup>1</sup>See Vincent, pp. 244-5.

<sup>2</sup>S. A. Cook: *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the light of Archaeology*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>See Vincent, *Canaan*, p. 288.

their seed for ever ! ”<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that the motive for their fear of disturbance in the grave was this—that, if the corpse was buried, the soul of the dead person was free either to dwell in the underworld or to revisit the body. If, on the other hand, it was exposed to light and air, the soul could not descend into the nether regions, but was condemned to wander upon the earth in a country not its own.<sup>2</sup>

As regards the so-called sacrifices for the dead, if it were true that they were genuine sacrifices to propitiate the departed, there would be no escape from the conclusion that the dead *in general* were regarded as gods. But there seems to be no sufficient proof that the offerings made in regard of the dead were sacrifices made *to* them ; rather, as the Hadad monument implies, they were offerings made *to* the gods on behalf of the dead.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, what was the Semitic conception of the next life ? We have already seen that for them death was not the end of all things, that a life with the Rephaim existed for some at least of the departed, that intercession could and should be made on behalf of the deceased. Outside the Bible and the Babylonian literature we have little in the way of detailed description of the abode called in Hebrew *sheol*, and in Babylonian *arallû*.<sup>4</sup> But we may judge that the dominant ideas were similar throughout the Semitic world—of a *vita umbratilis*, a shadowy and attenuated life, a condition of affairs where the deceased were constantly in need of various offices of piety on the part of the living. Among the Canaanites, the prevailing conception is well described by Père Vincent : “ In so far as the established practices make it known to us, this new world would appear to have had few attractions. The existence that was there endured must have greatly resembled that which men led on earth—compounded of the same needs, subject to like toil, having apparently a capacity for the same joys, but exposed to the same perils, since it was as necessary to provide oneself with weapons as with all the remainder of one’s goods ; in short, nothing indicates in this notion the absence

<sup>1</sup>Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, p. 32. See also the Nêrab inscriptions, p. 186, and that of Ahiram of Byblos in *Revue Biblique*, 1925, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup>Lagrange, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup>See Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. 162, lines 21 ff.

<sup>4</sup>Consult Dhorme’s article : “ Le Séjour des Morts chez les Babyloniens et les Hébreux ” in *Revue Biblique*, 1907, pp. 59–78.

of all fear, or any compensation, by reason of some more exalted hope, for the disquiet inseparable from that entry into the unknown which death inevitably represented even for the most enlightened philosophical speculation."<sup>1</sup> There is no sign of any appreciation of "the progress of the life here, as from divinely quickened elements, towards final causes, the greatness of the spiritual man, his far-reaching aims, his everlasting duration, the curtain raised before his future state." As we have said, God did not leave Himself entirely without witness even in the midst of the degraded and often immoral polytheism of that Eastern world. But "the singleness of heart, the sunny confident belief, that condition of all the just so beautifully yet exactly described by the Apostle's words 'abounding in hope through the Holy Ghost,'"<sup>2</sup>—all these, like the purer doctrine of Monotheism and the serene faith in a coming Messiah, went quite beyond the content and the purview of the ancient Semitic religions.

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<sup>1</sup>*Canaan*, pp. 294-5.

<sup>2</sup>Rom. xv. 13. The last two quotations are from Montgomery Carmichael's *The Solitaries of the Sambuca*, 1914, pp. 183-4.



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# THE RELIGION OF ANCIENT GREECE

By REV. C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

It used to be thought that nothing could be known for certain about the history of Greece further back than some 700 years B.C., if so far. The poems of Homer were supposed to be little save romance. But as from about 1870, Dr. Schliemann made his excavations on the site of Troy and then of Mycenæ, and excavation has continued ever since: it has added a millennium to history. It has proved that a most elaborate civilisation of mysterious origin existed all round the eastern Mediterranean and perhaps round the whole of that Sea. Its centre seems to have been Crete, and its apogee about 2000 B.C., though its contacts with Egypt seem to show that it existed 2,000 years before that. By 1500 it was weakening. From that time on, so the present writer holds to be the more probable, northern tribes of our Aryan stock began to filter southward from, maybe, the neighbourhood of the Baltic itself. They had hardly any culture at all, and so, while their greater physical strength enabled them to get the better of the effete populations they encountered, in all exterior things they succumbed to the prevalent civilisation, alien as it was to their instincts. Some tribes came more nearly due south into the "Greek" peninsula, as it was afterwards called.<sup>1</sup> Others travelled south-east and even reached what is now the Hellespont, crossed it, and established themselves

<sup>1</sup>The name "Greek" is derived from the Graioi or Graikoi, a quite negligible little group of immigrants. This "fixation" and generalisation of some unimportant name is no rare accident in history.

down the coast of Asia Minor. The leading group in the peninsula came to be that of the Achæans, at Corinth : in Asia, a town of unique importance, as controlling the mouth of the Hellespont, was Ilion or Troy. Clashes between the eastward-sailing traders and the Asiatic city must have been constant. They may well have reached a climax owing to an incident like the rape of the Western princess Helen, by Paris of Troy ; certainly a war took place, out of which Homer wove his imperishable poems. Let us allow that Troy was sacked in this war about 1200-1100, and that the tradition concerning this was immortalised by an " Ionic " (Greek-Asiatic) poet about 1000, his poems being modified or added to by successive generations till about 800. Meanwhile the immigrants were consolidating themselves on both sides of the water, and developing their original cultural tendencies, so that Homer represents a mixed civilisation, including elements proper to the pre-Greeks and the Greeks alike.

From about 1000 to 800, a new wave of Aryan immigration from the north took place, called " Dorian " after a tribal sub-division of the invaders. This was hardy and even brutal, and devastated what it met with, kindred in blood though it were. The Dorians occupied the southern part of the peninsula and became called Spartans, after their chief town. " Greece " has an enormous coastline, and is interiorly divided up into tiny regions because of its mountainous nature. In each of these a " state " developed, with its own dialect, customs, and worship. Briefly, in the south, Sparta was the centre : Corinth remained powerful because of its unique place upon the isthmus between the two parts of Greece : in the south-eastern corner of the northern half, Athens became chief city : still further north, Thebes was powerful in marshy Bœotia ; then came the great well-watered horse-breeding plain of Thessaly. This was enclosed to the north by the vast mountain-mass, Olympus.

A score of these small states developed, gradually (save Sparta) discarding kings and even the " tyrants " (which merely means autocrats) who usually followed them, and who were responsible for much cultural development. The

prolific Greek race, moreover, unable to feed itself at home, and audacious on the sea, had sent colonists out in all directions, as far as Marseilles and even Spain.

In the earlier part of the fifth century B.C., Persia entered on a period of fantastic expansion. Mesopotamia, Egypt, Asia, fell before her: nothing seemed destined to prevent her submerging also the West. In 490, a small expedition was sent against Greece, and was defeated at Marathon. Ten years later, the Persian monarch, Xerxes, furious at this check, sent a huge armament westward, which was smashed by land and sea at Thermopylæ, Salamis, and Plataea. These sensational victories were followed by a brief but stupendous development of creative power within Greece, especially in Athens. Poets were followed, most logically, by calmer historians; and these by philosophers. But meanwhile Athens was beginning to tyrannise over Greece: she was no less sensationally defeated by Sparta in the straits between Sicily and Italy; and Sparta and then Thebes had their brief paramountcies. Finally, the despised northern Macedonia rose to eminence. Its king, Philip, defeated the southern allies in 338: and his astounding son, Alexander, seemed likely to conquer the whole eastern world, and in fact carried a part-Greek civilisation as far as India. But he died in 323; his vague pulpy empire was divided up; Greece itself was divided within itself, and a new power, the Roman, became heir of all these glories in decay. In 168 B.C., Macedonia became a Roman province; Greece, in 147-146. Within this framework, we can watch the vicissitudes of "Greek" religion.

## I. THE PRE-GREEK WORLD

THE "pre-Greek" period has left no documents that we can read. Its material relics are, however, innumerable. At all points it differed from what followed it: it delighted, artistically, in spirals where the Greek liked angles: its palaces disposed the men's and women's houses side by side (as in Homer's *Odyssey*), not one behind the other—women's life was in fact much freer

than it became : its columns tapered downwards ; Greek columns were narrower at the top : its armour was quite different from Greek armour : its dress was "shaped" to the body, not draped : finally, its religion (for, needless to say, it *had* a religion) involved the veneration of its characteristic Column, a Two-Headed Axe, and a female figure. Lions are sometimes found ramping on either side of the Column and of the Goddess. Possibly the cult of this Goddess—a mother-goddess cult was prevalent all over nearer Asia for ages—partly survived in, or coloured, the Greek cult of Artemis (see p. 10) : the other symbols lapsed. But the ancient religion left its mark upon what followed. The Greeks never thought that their gods were *primitive*. They were thought to be descended from earlier gods ; or to have conquered them : or in some instances, the primitive gods survived as "heroes" (see p. 19), or again, were relegated underground and thought to be "earth" deities as opposed to the "heavenly" gods who took their colour from the supreme Greek god, Zeus (see p. 15). So far as is useful, such survivals will be indicated below.

## II. PRIMITIVE GREEK WORSHIP

In describing the Greek religion, we must not be taken as assuming a period, when there were *no gods* but only "spirits," as having preceded the period of "god-worship." But it is simpler first to attend to that "animistic" element in Greek religion which it has, so definitely yet so differently, in common with the Roman religion, and which played unofficially an almost greater part in Greek life than the worship of gods did, save that of Zeus or some local deity.

Like his "Italian" cousins, the Greek was aware of spiritual forces operating everywhere, in earth and air, wind, water, plant, and animal. But unlike them, he instantly visualised them and gave them shapes, sex, and names. Thus the earlier rites, proper to days

when there was no image, no temple,<sup>1</sup> became rapidly "anthropomorphised," and linked up with, or directed towards, some god who seemed appropriate, and a story would be developed accounting for the connection by some incident in his career—for the "myth-making" propensity was as lively among the Greeks as it was almost still-born among the Italians.

We can safely say that the characteristic of the Greek, and of his religion, was *vitality*. In a sense, this is universally true; but for the Greek it remained so. His cult was full of vegetation-festivals, and women had a remarkable series of festivals of their own.

Thus harvest festivals occupied the month Thargelion (May-June): at the Thargelia, offerings of grain—firstfruits were made; branches decked with wool were offered and then put up over house-doors for the rest of the year; a *pelanos*, or porridge was given to "gods" and *nephalia*, or honey-drinks (from days when the vine was not yet introduced) to the dead. But the rite being *fireless* indicates a period previous to that when the gods were stabilised on Mount Olympus and smoke was needed to carry the scent up to them. Not but what fire might be early used in order to make a "holocaust" of the offering.<sup>2</sup> Other festivals of this

<sup>1</sup>Even in Homer, there is mention only once of an image: we can indeed trace, in paintings, the evolution of a shaped image from a mere pole or tree-trunk, which after a while was human-wise draped and then developed a head and finally became the complete human figure. To the end, sacred images which were *old*, might be shapeless: *e.g.*, two planks nailed together stood for Kastor and Polydeukês: meteoric stones were other "images." Temples keep pace with images. At first the god would have only a "demesne" in which worship went forward. When he had an image, a temple was needed for it to live in: Greek temples were on the whole shrines for the god, not "churches" for the people. Popular worship was practically open-air.

<sup>2</sup>It is impossible in a series of this sort that the opinions of the several writers should always and wholly coincide as to disputed matters. Personally, we hold that destruction is not in any sense included in the essential idea of "sacrifice." We hold sacrifice to be an exterior expression of man's sense of total dependence on "God." He "gives" to God something that represents himself—over which he has, as we say, "extended his personality." This

nature were the Kallynteria and the Plynteria, which involved the cleaning-up or washing of the farm-demesne or utensils, and later of some temple or image: thus in the Vestalia (see *Religion of Early Rome*) the festival (essentially connected with grain) ended with a ritual sweeping-out of the Vestals' house and the carrying of the refuse to the Tiber.

But a profoundly interesting element in these or other such feasts was the "Pharmakos," roughly, "medicine." The accumulated evil of the year was compressed, so to say, into one object, which was ejected from the city, or farm, or estate. A man, into whom the seeds of evil had converged and there concentrated themselves, was "led forth," given cheese, barley-cake, figs, leeks, and various purgative plants, and then either in person or effigy was stoned or strangled and buried. The varieties of this ritual were many (thus at Chæronea, "Hunger" was driven out in the person of a slave); and it may never, perhaps, be certain how far actual death was inflicted in "civilised" times at any rate. But since condemned criminals, who would

gift takes on a unique quality precisely because it is to God that it is given. But since the man may feel forced to express the totality and irrevocability of his offering, he is apt to destroy it. It is *all* given; it can never be *taken back*. The destruction occurs for the sake of the man's own imagination, not for the god's sake. (Indeed, one who has attained to a philosophical idea of God may say that He, who is supremely "Being," and creator of all that in any sense *is*, can derive no pleasure from seeing anything reduced to *less* in the line of "being" than what He made it to be or become.) Further, a man may feel that grain or fruit (if he be an agriculturist) or an animal (if he be still but "pastoral"), is indeed the most precious of his possessions, but not yet sufficiently expressive of his *self*. Hence the tendency to sacrifice a son, especially a firstborn; and even a more or less morbid self-mutilation; and even ritual suicide. Expiatory sacrifices are in a class of their own: a man may feel that he "deserves" punishment and even destruction, and symbolise this exteriorly. But many ancient sacrifices were by no means expiatory; and so, when destruction enters into them, we hold that it did so for the reason offered above. The destruction-element existed entirely for the satisfaction of the sacrificer's imagination, and not at all as essential in the *idea* of sacrifice itself.

have had to die anyhow, might be used as "pharmakoi," and since ancient civilisations were very patchy, so to speak, and admitted many horrors and violent immoralities, I should think it more likely that the ceremony began with the expulsion of a human victim, who if not killed was allowed to die, as Agar was meant to do, and as the scapegoat did, and reverted periodically to this.

Women's festivals were extremely ancient, the most important being the Thesmophoria, in Pyanepsion (October-November). It was in three parts. First, women, after three days' purification, threw swines' flesh (swine were "prolific" animals) into caverns where old gods lived in the form of snakes; after a while the women descend, making a noise "to scare away the snakes," bring back the rotten flesh, and put it on altars. This was called the Kathodos and the Anodos—path down, path up. Paste, in the form of snakes or sexual emblems, was also used. Next came the Nestia, or Fast, rigorously observed. No council was held; the courts were shut; prisoners released. A "chasing-away"—probably some form of Pharmakos, occurred. The women sat mourning. Then came the Glad Birth or Begetting, exultantly celebrated. *Thesmophoria* means the carrying of the "regulation" (traditionally ritual) things, in this case, primarily the sex-emblems, which were also carried in the Arrephoria or Arretophoria ("carrying of not-to-be-named things"), a maidens' version of the women's feast. They carried them at night, in veiled baskets, on their heads, to the temple of Aphrodite-in-the-Gardens, and brought back new ones without ever seeing them. Other such feasts existed, all concerned, really, with fertility; but one very important point about all of them is that they survived in and, indeed, were largely the origin of the "Mysteries" spoken of below. Again, these and other early feasts were really pieces of active ritual; and their names, like those of the earlier Latin feasts, are neuter plural, having nothing to do with personal "gods," at least directly.



## III. THE OLYMPIANS

We must recall again that even among gods the Olympians were not first in the field. Few of the older dynasty survived: the most noticeable, Cronos, ranked as father of Zeus. He may have come from the East and have been a vegetation deity, but must not be identified with the Carthaginian Moloch, even though the human sacrifices offered to both led some Greek writers to make the identification. He and his reign were "overthrown" by Zeus: other shadowy figures that survived are represented as having sided with the new-comers against their own "order." Cronos maintained a position as god of slaves (a conquered people is naturally enslaved; and its god, too, naturally, becomes god of slaves in general): but he did not enter vitally into Greek religion and can be disregarded.

The history of the god Apollo is more characteristically Greek, perhaps, even than that of the supreme god, Zeus. We cannot, save in the case of Zeus himself, make any use of the names of the gods to discover their origin. But their titles are thus useful, and Apollo was from the outset the "warder off" and the "wolfish one" (Lukeios). The immigrants brought him with them probably by the route that entered the future Greece from the north-east, not by the older one, down the west coast of the peninsula. When did he become connected with the sun? No one knows, nor how. I surmise that the constant connection between far-shooting arrows and rays of the sun held good in this case too; and again, his power of warding-off became especially connected with plague—his invisible arrows turned back the no less unseen shafts of the pestilence. But what you can avert, you can bestow: much as the wolf-god could control the wolves because he had an affinity with them, so he could cause the pestilence that he forefended. His association with Delphi became supremely important. The place—a cleft

in the towering rocks that overlook the Corinthian gulf—was immemorially “sacred.” When the Greeks reached this, as they could both from west and east, they superimposed the worship of Apollo upon that of the ancient nameless earth-gods who lived in the chasm in the form of a serpent. They first called this reeking abyss “Puthon,” *i.e.*, rottenness: then, altering the pronounciation, they made the same word mean “Enquiring.” Sharp fighting was required for possession of the shrine; and even later on, when myths had explained that an amicable arrangement had been arrived at between the ancient and the invading gods, a purificatory procession from Thessaly (north-east) came each year in memory of the purification Apollo himself had endured for killing the aboriginal snake. The shrine became famous, and even when other bands of Greeks had colonised the Ægean island Delos, and had declared that Apollo had been born there, and had developed another great shrine, the two places kept on good terms and co-operated. At Delphi, a girl “who must not be too well-educated” (it was afterwards laid down), sat over the mephitic cleft, chewed bay-leaves, foamed, fell into a trance, and uttered inarticulate cries. The resident priests put these into verse, and gave them as answers to enquirers. As centuries passed, the place grew unthinkably rich, and possessed a staff capable of giving advice about international matters to generals and politicians. The shrine became full of unintelligible symbols—thus a great E was put up there, about the possible meanings of which Plutarch wrote a whole essay. Undoubtedly the Oracle did good on the whole, and fostered intermittent peace between possible belligerents and diffused a “Greek” outlook and, when art developed, provided the radiant Apollo as *motif* for some of the loveliest statues extant. Yet much in his myths is cynical and immoral; when Greece waned, his priests became too ignorant even to make hexameters; earthquakes interfered with the locality; finally a Roman Emperor ordered the shrine to be closed. The place reverted to snakes, loneliness, and echoing winds.

Artemis became accidentally allied with Apollo as his sister and moon-goddess. But her ancient cult-titles describe her as She-of-the-Marshes, of the Pine, the Bay-tree; she is gradually surrounded by animals, but always the wilder ones—stag, wolf, bear, freely flying birds and swimming fish, not ox nor pig nor horse. This was summed up in the title *Agrotera*, goddess of the "wild," as prairie or veld are wild. One of her rituals was strange. Girls danced a "bear-dance" and were called bears. Elsewhere, goats were sacrificed to her, but dressed as girls. This may possibly be connected with some ancient totemism; the goddess, and her clan-worshippers, may have been connected with bear or goat, so that the distinction between human and animal was vague because of the spiritual link, if not the common blood, that united them. Animals could be called, and dressed, as humans; if there were ever a human sacrifice of a girl no doubt she would have been regarded as a "bear." That Artemis became definitely "huntress" indicates a change in man's way of looking at animals. The "family tie" melted: animals meant just food to be killed: the goddess was invested with corresponding propensities, though to the end the "good huntsman" ought to spare any quite young hare in honour of the goddess who once was protectress of all wild things. Her association with Apollo may well have been due simply to her hunting bow-and-arrow; and with the moon to a further parallelism between her and him. Her ancient title, "parthenos," did not imply virginity, but that the indomitable goddess submitted to no husband; in so far as she became a sort of patron of chastity, I think this may have been due to an artistic contrast with Aphrodité, felt to be suitable to so hardy a huntress. None the less, her worship was often so orgiastic as to remind one of the East, and forces us to ask whether she were indigenous at all. One is tempted to see in her a survival of the pre-Greek goddess of "wild things"; and certainly it was she who fused at once with the great Asiatic nature-goddess whose greatest temple was

to be at Ephesus. But I am not convinced that she was a foreign importation, or even a survival. The sense of femininity in Nature is strong; it easily suggests that the power controlling the prolific world is feminine; when nature itself is wild, that power is inevitably conceived of in terms of wildness rather than as tame.

Aphrodité was, however, undoubtedly imported from the East, probably by way of Cyprus. Such importations are not surprising, because once you are polytheist, there can be no limit to your polytheism. A divine power, worshipful and potent anywhere, is likely to be so everywhere. The nations of the nearer East all had their high goddesses, and these, whatever their sexual aspect, were emphatically protectresses of the State. So Aphrodité became progressively the guardian of towns and states. She could be represented as in armour, and was called Spear-Woman, Army-Conqueror, and was easily associated with Ares, the savage war-god, whence the Greeks, always scurrilous-minded, ultimately invented all sorts of tales about them. But at first it was possible to doubt whether she were so much as really feminine, and she could be depicted as bearded. When citizenship was introduced into Athens, it was she who was chosen to be patroness of the new state, and one of her most important titles was Pan-Demos, "of All the Folk," which she shared with Athené and even Zeus. Caring for the People, she naturally cared for families; children were consecrated to her; and as late as the second century A.D., boys and girls offered a lock of their hair to her.<sup>1</sup> Her oriental prototypes

<sup>1</sup>Plato had a theory of "two loves"—Sacred and Profane, as we might say. He knew that Aphrodité had two titles, Pandemos, and Urania (Heavenly), and also knew quite well that where she was worshipped as the former, her cult was sober and civic; the latter title linked her up with the oriental "queens of heaven" whose worship was licentious. But with that impishness which he, and his friends, so much enjoyed, he inverted the meaning of the words, causing Urania to mean "heavenly," ethereal, in fact higher even than "Platonic love," as we now say; and "Pandemos," promiscuous and scandalous. The Greeks, when serious, loved to play the fool; though, when fooling, they were not always serious. Hence part of their intriguing charm.

were connected with the sea, probably because commerce was important to their clients : the Greeks, great colonisers, took this up—she is goddess of Fair Sailing, and so forth ; promontories are named after her : her own name ended by being interpreted as “ foam-born.” Whence, in the long run, Botticelli’s picture. But she was, too, goddess of land-interests—of flowers, gardens, and “ Good Fruit ” : it is as vegetation-goddess that she is linked with Adonis (see p. 22), and could most easily be identified later on with the Roman Venus, goddess of plants. It is worth saying here that the beauty we associate with her name, and indeed with Apollo and Artemis, and the dignity we attach to *e.g.*, Zeus and Athené, is entirely due to a very brief period of creative Greek artists. Men became “ unable to think of Zeus, save as Pheidias portrayed him ” at Olympia, says one writer. Meanwhile the cults of these deities, and the stories about them, could be as obscene, grotesque, barbaric, as you please.

Thus the history of Pallas-Athené is significant. Most of the invading tribes of “ Greeks ” believed in a presiding female spirit whom they called, contentedly, The Maiden, or *Koré*. So when one group of them captured the rocky hummock lying east-west in the mountain-ringed plain, afterwards called Attiké, it became named Athenai, and its Maiden, the Athenæan Girl. And when they conquered another tribe called the Pallantidai, they united *their* Maiden with their own, and Pallas-Athené came into existence. But the Maiden had supervened upon at least two layers of previous religion. As usual, the primitive gods survived somewhere inside the Rock in the form of snakes ; Poseidon too had been there, probably a pre-Greek god, possibly a water-god ; anyhow, as the earlier population was progressively driven off the coast into islands, he went with them and became definitely a sea-god. Again, as usual, an amicable understanding had been arrived at—Poseidon struck the rock and a horse came out—invaluable gift when horses were still hard to come by or use (*riding* occurs only once in Homer. and then as a form of acrobatics) ; the Maiden

produced an olive-tree. Thereafter, on the Rock, the three layers of worship were carefully attended to, and the positions of the prehistoric demesnes were responsible for the irregular disposition of the buildings upon the Acropolis till the end.

It is possible that this Koré was associated at first with some sort of bird, indeed, the owl (an unusual rock-haunting owl would suffice to start the myth that this "was" the Koré), but there is so little trace of gods in animal form in Greek tradition that it is unlikely that her stock epithet, *glaukôpis*, usually translated "grey-eyed," and meant thus by Homer, originally signified "owl-faced," nor, I think, did Heré's epithet *bo-ôpis* mean cow-headed. And since the mania for "deriving" deities from physical phenomena (*e.g.*, Athené from a thunder-cloud) has died out, we need not linger over her title "Tritogeneia," Triton-born, as though it meant "water-born," though Greek writers placed her origin in Libya because there was a river Triton there, and she had a strongly developed cult there. But there were two "Triton"-rivers in Greece itself, in Thessaly and Bœotia; so the colonists who brought her cult can quite well have brought the name of the river too, and either have re-named a local stream outright, or modified a somewhat similar name, especially if some local cult bore some similarity to their own Athené-cult. Personally, I should suppose that if Athené had accumulated a "Triton" title, owing to being notably worshipped beside a Greek Triton-river, colonists from that place will have carried both cult and title with them, and quite possibly have "christened" any river, where they halted, "Triton": the name stuck where they finally established themselves. Anyhow, Athené is certainly not a water-goddess, nor yet Libyan. The rival story of her birth is that Zeus had swallowed the daughter of an earlier goddess, Metis: the spear-point of this infant (who was in armour) pricked the inside of his skull, so that after a while she broke her way through. *Metis* (whatever the original form of the name was) meant Craft or Device in Greek; so that moralising

myth-makers had good opportunities for describing Athené as the Thought of Zeus, leaping full-formed, invincible, from his mind. The devouring of the offspring of Metis by Zeus is the reflection, once more, of that early conflict between racial cults: when art-forms had accustomed the Greeks to thinking of Athené as "armed," the myth grew up to satisfy their sense of realism, and also of the comic. For the Greeks liked to laugh. The essential importance of Athené was her civic one. She shared the title Polias, "of the City" with Zeus alone: she was *Poliouchos*, City-Warden; *Archegetis*, Commander in Chief (even our own princesses can be Colonels); she guarded treaties and the treasury; she cared for young men and their boat-races, and for athletics and musical contests; and for girls, who on becoming brides were dedicated to her on the Acropolis: her symbol was carried to women by her priestesses: she was goddess of Retribution, but also protected the "righteous homicide." When her wooden image was yearly washed, *i.e.*, purified, it was so, first because it needed it (having grown smoky from sacrifice and incense—always look for a material, realist element *first*), and also because it *looked* as though it might have been partial to its citizens (it had *closed eyes*). She was essentially *Pronoia*, providential rather than prescient, in regard of her folk: and of course (since they were quarrelsome) she was the Defender, the Fighter, the Devastator, the Trumpeter.

But in the intervals of warring, her citizens developed the arts: she was Starter (in races); Work-woman, Mechanist; Beauty-maker; nor can we exhaust her titles—they covered the whole area of Athenian interests. Her "type" had already been fixed; but Pheidias dignified it after the Persian wars, so far as was possible when Athenian conceit insisted that the spear-point of her statue on the Acropolis should be visible from the sea, though the image must have dwarfed everything else upon the Rock. Moreover, the glorious artist was had up for embezzling the money granted for the gold and ivory which composed her statue, though

this may have been a political plot against his patron, Periklés. Religion, and art, had little to do with morals. We speak of this below. Here, enough to say that the civic influence of Athené was enormous. The Panathenaic festival (quinquennial) brought tributes from all cities allied with Athens. Resident aliens did menial work. The Olive (of inestimable food-value) was prominent. Dyed garments were prohibited (because dye was an import). Country-folk brought Athené a new *peplos*, or robe, made doubtless of indigenous wool; it was carried in procession on a mast over a car made like a ship. Athens was practically indistinguishable from Athené.

It is impossible to describe and discuss every Greek god or goddess. I omit, then, the fire-god, Hephaistos; the messenger-god, Hermés (the other "messenger," Iris, may for once be a personification—the Rainbow. Iris slid down it, rather as the gods in the Rheingold climb up it: thus she came from "Olympos," and thus they reached Valhalla); Arés, the War-god, and many others. Enough if we consider the supreme god, Zeus (and his consort, Heré); and the disconcerting imported god Dionysos (and with him, Demeter, mother of the "Maiden," *par excellence*).

The name Zeus (for once, etymology helps) is from the root *div* and alludes to the "bright sky." This was an inheritance from the very remote past. His titles were such as Sky-ey, All-Day-Long, Showery, Wet, Good-Wind-ish, Lightning-ish; Down-Swooper (*i.e.*, thunder-bolt); of the Far-Borne Voice (*i.e.*, Thunderer); Cloud-Gatherer. Zeus, evidently, *was* not the Sky, but operated (so to say) within and from the sky. It becomes practically an affair of philosophy to decide whether the explicit notion of a universal god came first, or whether the departmentalised sky-god was thought of first and then became universalised because the sky is the only thing that covers everything else.

Anyhow, Zeus at one time tended to become the god of "voices" almost more than the god of the sky. He was "God of all voices," God the Speaker, the Good



Speaker, the Good Messenger.<sup>1</sup>

Zeus, being the *one* god whom all Greeks came to worship as supreme, or always had so worshipped, was necessarily god of the Family, of the Clan, of the Tribe. He was Zeus of Begetting, of Marriage, of the Storehouse, and state-treasury; the All-Seer, and thus of Rescue, Hospitality, and Friendship, and Avenger of Blood. When you reach "blood," you have got to the essence of "life," as all primitive mentalities conceive it. The shedding of innocent blood differed from a guilty shedding in that expiation and purification are *more easily* obtained in the former case than in the latter. But since there was no imaginable sphere of national action in which Zeus was not pre-eminent—he was god also of the sea, and of the lower world, yet so closely involved in human worries as to be "Zeus-who-keeps-the-Flies-away" (no doubt really from *sacrifices*, lest the flies should taint them)—I add only one curious piece of Zeus-ritual into which his great civic title of *Polieus* (cf. *Polias* above of Athené) entered—the Diipoleia. A story had to be invented to explain it, so odd did it come to seem.

Sopatros was offering cereals: one of his oxen ate some; he slew and buried it, and fled. Hence a dearth: an Oracle said: "Punish the murderer; raise the dead; at the same sacrifice at which it died let all eat its flesh." Sopatros returned, and offered to re-slay the ox if they would make him citizen and partake in the murder. The "Diipoleia" were therefore instituted. All took a share in slaying an

<sup>1</sup>Yet he was somehow also a wolf-god: and in Arcadia, an upland district that lay for centuries feeding on its own dreams, anyone who assisted at the yearly sacrifice to Zeus became a wolf for a year—for ever, if he had tasted human flesh—and anyone who entered his shrine there *cast no shadow* and in fact died within the year. This may look back to days of human sacrifice; but how explain the casting of no shadow? Personally, I surmise that having entered the god's sanctuary, you became so wholly *his* that you were outside human life altogether. Yet so vague would be the thought that no one asked whether this were a punishment or a privilege, or both: nor whether you had just ceased to exist, or had entered on a supra-mundane manner of existence.

ox, and then ate of its flesh. It was then stuffed with grass and yoked as though alive. The *axe* was then condemned and thrown into the sea. This was stereotyped thus—Barley and wheat were placed on an altar; an ox was made to eat some; a priest slew the ox and fled as guilty; the axe was then condemned. The priests of Zeus Polieus and Athené Polias were the “Boutadæ,” ox-men; the judge of involuntary homicides, in Zeus’s court “in the Palladium,” was attended by an “ox-yoker.” This looks back, then, to an ox-clan, when ox was akin to man, and citizenship depended on communion in its flesh. (The transference of guilt is quite a common feature: when Ostiaks killed a bear they used to say to it: “It was a Russian that killed you; a Russian knife, a Russian axe,” etc.). Zeus, as god of the ox-clan, was angered by the “murder,” satisfied with the substitute, and brought back his folk into communion with himself by means of their communion in his beast.

You would have supposed that the supremacy of Zeus made for monotheism. Despite theorists, it did not, not even when certain gods were regarded as “forms” of Zeus. Any exalted notions about Zeus came from philosophy which used his name rather to describe the “All,” in a pantheistic way, than to express God infinite and one. What came to be felt acutely was the clash between God’s will and man’s freedom; and especially between God’s will and Necessity, or Fate. I cannot admit that Fate (*Moiræ*), even in Homer, is merely the will of the gods, Zeus included. Zeus grieves bitterly at *having* to send the doom of death on his favourite warriors. Personally, I hold that the problem was never solved by the Greeks, but that they oscillated according to their mood between Fatalism and belief in an almighty Zeus. Since their special temperament always led them towards the notion of “finishedness”—“perfection” meant for them something fulfilled within its due limits: it was the opposite to the endless upward aspiration and vocation of Judaism, for example—they tended towards the notion of inexorable Fate: but since they too were men they could not escape an

ultimate belief in an all-powerful, all-wise, all-governing God.

As for his consort, Heré, she always appears together with him, and as his counterpart in regard not least of women. Save in Argos and Samos, she was singularly un-political. I cannot believe that her marriage with Zeus represented the union of heaven and earth in spring. The marriage was celebrated in Gamelion, *i.e.*, January. It would take far too long to describe this ceremonial, often comic, never really indecent, though crude. Half its varieties suggest a quarrel between her and Zeus. Thus her statue is constantly hidden. At Plataea she "deserts" Zeus; he dresses up a puppet to make her jealous, and goes with it in bridal procession through Mount Cithæron. She emerges, flies at the puppet, is reconciled, honours it, and finally destroys it. I imagine that at the back of these grotesqueries lies the primitive custom of "marriage by capture." Thus in one place an "attack" by youths was organised: in another myth Zeus pursued her in the form of a cuckoo before he caught her. Anyhow, she ended up as the somewhat austere protectress of all marriage-laws, of girls, of wives, and of births.

If it seems incredible that Greek religion should contain so much that is "absurd" and coarse, we must begin by divesting ourselves of the whole of what we have absorbed from the masterpieces of Greek sculpture. Those glories were created very late (430-330), and the types they set degenerated fast. Pheidias's Zeus at Olympia was supreme for its "majesty combined with benignity": but the majesty soon became mere haughtiness; the benignity, sensuousness; the air of freedom from old artistic (and religious) categories turned into an atmosphere of luxuriance and easy-going bonhomie; attempts to reproduce the deep thoughtfulness of the god ended in twisted and tormented brows. Zeus-Ammon, with his ram-like nose, was the last degradation. Bad barocco was our own version of this; violence, for strength: noise, for exultation; sensuous Sebastians and Magdalens. Further, only a small element among the

Athenians, even, really liked "high art," or could stand much of it. The shoddier elements in Euripidés (see p. 26) became their favourites; they ate sardines and olives and whistled, hummed, and kicked in the theatres the moment they were bored. Save at crises, or against the grain, the Athenian was frivolous and superficial, but also very impressionable. He had a conscience: he could be "shocked" to his moral core—on the whole, by wrong done to the defenceless: children, the aged; the blind. Of all these the gods were guardians: but it was conscience that shaped the gods, not they who governed conscience. We can say that the Greek conscience was always ahead of religion, and certainly of the stories told about religion and its divinities. In fact, so far as religion was not external and ritual, or again official, *i.e.*, civic, it centred round lesser gods, like Hermés, or heroes, like Heraklés, who did you the good turns of every day. A word, then, about "heroes."

They had nothing to do with what we mean by "the heroic." They were, so to say, Saints minus holiness—Dead Men still powerful; almost, dead gods still powerful. Because your gods had conquered older ones you did not disregard the vanished deity, sulking his wan life out by waterfalls, or in the form of snakes lurking in ancient tombs. You allowed the altar of the older god to stand *under* your own god's altar, or even gave him a small patch of land beside or even within the demesne proper to the newer. But you did not insult *your* god by calling his victim "god": you named him "hero." But men who had really lived and died could also become "heroes" if they had impressed themselves on popular imagination, or *showed* themselves as surviving by strange things happening at their tombs, such as snakes living there and drinking milk put for them. The Greeks were much intrigued by these weird creatures and took a friendly view of them, and a snake was nearly always sculptured beside the effigy of the hero. Asklepios obtained a great vogue. He arrived at Athens from northern witch-ful Thessaly by way of Epidauros, about 421, and since he was famous

as a warder-off of evil was received into the demesne of a local anonymous Warder-Off by the poet Sophoclés, and Sophoclés himself afterwards received a cult there as Dexios, Welcomer—he who was kind to and welcomed anyone. There is then nothing to prevent Asklepios from having been a real man, a real doctor (witch-doctor, if you like; quack, psycho-therapist), who, like Sophocles, was exalted posthumously to the rank of “hero,” but had far wider success. His shrines were everywhere; they yield a rich crop of ex-votos—legs, livers, of those he had cured: he had real “nursing-homes” staffed by intelligent mind-healers: you went there, slept, and had your dreams “interpreted.” As for the “strong man,” Heraklés, he became the Helper-Hero in general: jolly, fearless, slayer of all manner of pests, a bit of a scallywag—he was immensely popular. Though most mythologies have their strong man, that is no reason to suppose there never was a real “strong man,” restless, beating records, a popular boast, finally “heroified.” Later, there was a regular ceremony for Heroification—like Canonisation, always minus the Holiness. Nor did the Greeks confuse their heroes with “real gods.”

#### IV. MYSTERIES

Students of religion and, indeed, of human nature, know well that man sooner or later struggles to break through the limits of his senses, and even of ideas, and even of good behaviour, merely in order to reach to the “beyond.” Even mathematics like to make use of “infinities” and even the fourth dimension. The Greeks, by preference, confined within the limits of intellectual “perfection,” finishedness, broke out all the more violently into “mysticism” precisely because this human instinct was repressed in them. The shape their outbreak took was partly due to their idea of “survival,” and partly to their notion of the World-Mother and World-Maiden, and received its special colouring from the imported “religion” of Dionysos.

The earlier Greek notion of survival was practically like that of the Oriental. You *survived*, but in a dim unreal way: the "man himself," as Homer, without noticing, puts it, remains lying on the battlefield: his "soul" joins the vague, twittering, witless throng of souls in the "unseen world," nor can they understand anything, or speak to any human, till freshly-shed blood have been drunk by them. True, they have ghostly occupations, which repeat spectrally what they best loved doing "in life": and after a while it was felt that some few specially favoured ones got through into Elysian fields: but even there life was but a filmy replica of reality. Once a year, however, the dead came forth on the feast of the Anthesteria: they emerged from the receptacles in which men had been buried and invaded the houses unless you kept them out by placing food on the threshold and purgative boughs over the door. At the end, you chanted: "Get out, you ghosts; the Anthesteria are over!" This is exactly parallel to the "feast" of the Lemuria, described in the essay on Early Rome. These ghosts are painted upon vases as a kind of measly microbe, and the word for them was "Ker": Ker practically meant "doom"; and the "ker" of Old Age, for example, was painted under a similarly dismal form. The "blithe" Greeks, as they were often miscalled by English sentimentalists, simply loathed the idea of old age, sickness, or death, and were haunted by it. They strained for an escape.

Vases show us a curious painting. A man brings a mallet down on the head of a girl emerging from the earth: or male figures similarly thump an enormous female head; or the maiden has got out as far as her knees, and the men are helping her. Once, "Pandora," Every-Gift, is written over the maiden. Such figures represent the same *theme* as that of the myth of Demeter and her daughter Koré (Earth-Mother and the Maiden). The Eternal Maiden is pursued by the God of Death—*i.e.*, quite simply, Death; she is carried off to Hadés: her sorrowing Mother, the Earth, seeks for her: for six months the Maiden may return to life. The paintings

represent this, and miracle plays did the same. A girl was actually sealed up, for an hour, or a day, in a cage or terra-cotta cell; thence, she was "brought back to life." All over the nearer East similar dramas of the Dying Year and Eternal Spring were enacted, only there the year's Vegetation was a youth, cruelly slain, sought by his weeping mother, or bride, and triumphantly restored to life. Thus, in Syria, Astarté (rightly identified by the Greeks with their Aphrodité) and Adonis (Adon, like Baal, means "Lord"); in Asia Minor, the Great Goddess and Attis; in Babylonia, Ishtar and Tammuz; in Egypt, Isis and Osiris. The Jews kept succumbing to such rituals: Ezekiel saw in vision the very Temple filled with pagan cults, among them women mourning for Tammuz, just as when the ill-fated Athenian fleet sailed for Syracuse, Athens was ringing with the cries of women lamenting Adonis. Now let us consider Dionysos.

Apollo began as a wild wolf-god: but the temperament of his worshippers forced him into "regularity": the cries of the Delphic "pythonesse" were drilled into hexameters, and a harp, his preferred instrument, is always rather chill. Into this came plunging from the north a god Dionysos, who represented Ecstasy—"Schwärmerei"—with songs in seemingly loose-strung rhythm, and the shrill sound of flutes. He *may* have coincided with the introduction of the vine into Greece: a case has been made out for his being a beer-god! But he goes back to something deeper in human nature, more akin to Asia, whether nearer or more distant (I mean, India), where dream and ecstasy are congenital, you would say. The Greeks did not associate drunkenness, at first, with the disgusting or puerile symptoms that we do. Spinoza was called a man "drunk with God." The Hebrews said that God had visited the earth and "inebriated it." Certain grains, or the vine, seemed able to liberate a man, liberate the god within him, send him free into an untrammelled world. The Greeks never fully approved of this invader: he seemed "anarchic": yet he had an irresistible success: he actually got into Delphi and halved the year's worship

there with Apollo. He developed, or kidnapped, feast after feast: the whole of our "theatre" and "drama" are descended from the performances at these feasts, and the first "make-up" was the smearing of the face with wine-lees. Women especially celebrated his nocturnal "orgies"; and the sceptical cynic Euripides, grown old and living at the northern Macedonian court, must have seen their midnight torches flickering through the mountain pine-trees, and have succumbed to their mystery, and thus have written his marvellous play, the *Bacchae*, so full of "thrill" that a Christian writer in the fourth or fifth century adapted it and called it "Christ Suffering"—for all manner of myths about the birth and death of Dionysos had been evolved.

We can now consider the "Mysteries." *Mystery* was a word originally signifying "secret," and derived from the noise *mmm* you can make with your lips closed. The most famous ones were those at Eleusis, near Athens. The Lesser Mysteries took place in February, and were but a preparation for the Greater ones in September. Certain sacred objects (*cf.* p. 7) were carried from Eleusis to Athens. A preliminary proclamation was made, excluding criminals, foreigners, etc., and swearing the candidates for initiation to secrecy. Next day they went to the sea, carrying a sucking-pig (emblem of fertility) which they would afterwards sacrifice to Demeter: there they bathed. This ritual purification became stereotyped, I think, in all "mystery" initiations. After two days' fasting they went in procession to Eleusis carrying the statue of Iakkhos, a young god ultimately identified with Dionysos. At Eleusis, after further fasting, a dish of mixed cereals was tasted, called the *kukeon*; and at night "mystery plays" were performed, finally representing the story of Demeter and Kore, conceivably the marriage of Demeter and Zeus, probably the birth of Dionysos, and no doubt the history of the soul in the after-world. The "*mystæ*," as the initiates now were called, returned convinced of their special intimacy with the gods and their safety from the perils of post-mortem existence. It would



be impossible to give all the details that are known of these or of allied Mysteries (they all had a "family likeness"), nor to offer arguments for what we are about to say—which contains, after all, nothing very original.

We perceive in these Eleusinian Mysteries a fundamental layer, which is, simply, a vegetation-festival in which, we saw (pp. 5, 7), the devotees, after a space of purgation and fasting (quite physical in its earliest form, and meant to drive out all seeds of ancient evil), ate an appropriate meal in common. Such celebrations inevitably drew into their orbit the story of Demeter and her daughter—the dying year and ever-recurring spring. Into this there entered the cycle of myths and rites connected with Dionysos, which told, practically, the same tale only on a much more ecstatic level. Finally, Orphic doctrines (see p. 29) filtered into the Mysteries, with their elaborate doctrine of the after-life. Here, in fact, occurs the only element of "doctrine." The "mystics" were not taught anything new: they were subjected to a series of thrills, of violent alternations of light and darkness, of exhibitions of symbols, of abstinence followed by rhythmic movements and processions. No one can fail to see how profound a nervous impression could thus be administered to a very unsophisticated, or again, an over-sophisticated, clientèle. Later on the Mysteries became a money-making affair; and no one who observes the normal reactions to fierce religious nervous strain can be surprised that Christian Fathers, feeling themselves emancipated from the duty of keeping their oath of secrecy, rail bitterly at the obscenities accompanying, or following, these rites.<sup>1</sup>

## V. PHILOSOPHY

People talk rashly about the "Greeks" as if they were all one set of people, thinking the same thoughts. What they really mean is a small clique among one

<sup>1</sup>For St Paul and the "Mysteries," see Essay 21, Appendix.

minor group, the Athenians, who inhabited one promontory, a triangular region called Attika. Greece was divided among a score of tiny states, all worshipping Zeus, no doubt, and one or the other of the Olympian gods, but having each their own dialect, their own customs, and character, and their peculiar cults. This is why it is really impossible to make an adequate survey of "Greek" religion. But certain general influences, as from the end of the fifth century B.C., affected more or less the whole Greek-speaking world. One was Poetry; the other, Philosophy.

We said that after the Persian Wars the Greeks went almost delirious with joy, feeling that their tiny rock alone had defeated so vast a power. The first transcendent poet was Aeschylus, in whom all but the spirit of the Hebrew prophets seemed to live. Aeschylus saw in the Persian catastrophe an example of his series—Wealth; Insolence (Man exalts himself over-high); Infatuation (Man exalts himself even as high as God); and Retribution. And the Curse upon the sinner was a "social" one, and might take generations to work itself out, as he showed in his tremendous trilogy concerned with the House of Agamemnon. Here was the frightful problem of inherited guilt clashing with individual free will. "That thou art guiltless of this murder, who shall assert? Yet *how? how?*" An ancestral Vengeance may be the accomplice! But also he definitely tries to purify the myths about the gods: in the *Eumenides*, Apollo is seen taking *peaceful* possession of his shrine at Delphi, and as oracular indeed, but only as mouthpiece of Zeus. Of Zeus he said: "Zeus is the air, Zeus earth, and Zeus the heavens, yes, and if aught there be yet more exalted than all these." He was struggling towards the assertion of one only God, transcendent, immanent, and holy. But Tragedy involved, for the Greek, not the mere victory of undiluted right over utter wrong, but the conflict of two partial rights. Perhaps his profoundest tragedy is, then, *Prometheus*, in which the Titan, survivor of the ancient divine régime, filches on men's behalf the inestimable gift of fire from the jealous upstart Olympians,

and is hideously punished by Zeus. How, in the other plays of the trilogy, the reconciliation was effected we do not know. Sophoclés moved in a more crystalline atmosphere: Eternal Laws energised calmly through a heaven of their own: you could hardly quarrel if men, small creatures, made their own miseries. Thus in the *Antigoné*, one's undoubted duty of paying the last rites to a beloved brother clashed with one's duty of not doing so if he had rebelled against one's State. Euripidés already marked a decline. Fantastically popular, he yet won but very few prizes from the cultured judges: they gave eighteen prizes to Sophocles; five only to Euripidés. Brilliant, iridescent (you may almost say, Swinburnian), he found problems rather to be material for logic-chopping than for profound or prayerful study: he was disgusted by the world, furious with it, rather than tormented in his conscience. He makes an exquisite picture of the little sacristan, Ion, only to show the crash of his whole world when he discovers that it was his adored and radiant master, Apollo, who had seduced his mother: in the *Hippolytos*, an even lovelier portrait of the white-souled lad is shown, and then, his ghastly death as the victim of two inscrutable, irresistible divine forces, Artemis, goddess of chastity, and Aphrodité, Passion. The great Æschylean attempt at solution, the serene acceptance of Sophocles, both went down into a savage, sneering scepticism. Yet, I hold, Euripidés himself succumbed, at the end—perhaps still sceptically, yet helplessly—to the mysticism of Dionysos.

But by this time Philosophy, which had begun in Ionia during the sixth century, had crossed to Greece. We have to notice it only in its reaction to religion. What it was seeking was the *one origin* of the manifold changing universe of experience. Thus Thalés assigned "water" as the one underlying substance of all phenomena; Heracleitos, "fire," only, a "thought-fire"; Pythagoras, "number," which really means rhythmic motion: Parmenidés held that human opinion alone placed "non-being" alongside of being, so that man lives in

an illusory world—and so forth. What all these men were most praiseworthily seeking was some *one* reality, one unifying formula, one explanation of motion and change—of “becoming”; and all alike they were magnificently able to disregard mere appearances. We are, as a matter of fact, no better off with our “ether” or “electricity.” Among ordinary men, taught by inferior minds, all this issued into a practical agnosticism, though few indeed would *deny* the gods, however much they might laugh when Aristophanés put scurrilous stories about them on to the comic stage. By the end of the fifth century, education at Athens was, in fact, in the hands of the “sophists.” The name is not essentially a reproach, any more than “tyrant” was. The worst that could be said of them was, perhaps, that they gave the frivolous, sharp-witted youth of Athens the education it *liked*, and, naturally, charged sometimes heavily for giving it. Against these—in a sense against everyone who did not “think out” his thoughts—the witty, exasperating, unanswerable, ugly, lovable Socrates (d. 399 B.C.) pitted himself. No wonder he was executed for “corrupting youth” and teaching atheism. He did the former, by forcing them out of conventional mental frameworks, which annoyed the State: he did not do the latter at all, save that he offered no means of reconciling traditional and external religion (which he carefully observed) with belief in *God*, which was his to a high degree. His central conviction was that knowledge—wisdom—was needed by all, and that nothing else was needed to solve the woes of man. But alas, that one “needs must love the highest when one sees it” is not true. Socrates neglected the Will, and indeed had no word for it—and perhaps the Greeks never did quite discover “will,” let alone come to grips with the problem of its “freedom.” Plato (d. 347) succeeded him as his supreme interpreter, while soaring far beyond him. It would be out of place even to outline his doctrine of “Ideas”; enough to say that at the head of his pyramid of eternal spiritual Facts (“ideas”) he placed that of Good: by this, did he mean *God*? I believe

that he *wanted* to, but that philosophically he could not see how this absolute immutable perfection could be offered as anything corresponding to man's religious needs as such. Source of all activity though it were, yet did it remain immobile in that Perfection, so that the most that could be said was that man, who by nature desires the absolute good and absolute beauty, strained in some sense towards it, though succumbing continually to inferior versions of it. And no wonder, because most men would infallibly take Plato's supreme Idea for the Ultimate Abstraction merely. Not even Plato could remain content with that, since he too was man. He needed a religion, and towards his old age I think he melted, as it were, towards Orphism (below), and even in his description of the death of Socrates he (evidently) identifies himself with a speaker, Simmias, who, abandoning all hope of reaching adequate intelligence of life here and hereafter by mere reasoning, says that one were wisest to attach oneself to what seems the best human account of things, and so sail as on a raft over life's stormy sea—unless, unless, one can make the same journey still more safely *by means of a Divine Word*—a revelation, as we would say.

Aristotle, a northerner, deeply influenced by Plato, reacted against him, and showed none of his susceptibility to systems other than his own. He certainly believed in a First Cause, utterly immutable, utterly "blissful" in its self-sufficiency. But again, into what relation, if any, could *man* enter with this absolute Existence? Well, towards It man must order his own existence, and man's highest happiness is in being as like It as possible, and in contemplating It. For no energy is higher than intellectual contemplation. Not, so far as I can see, that Aristotle's God *responds* to any of this. God "moves" the world, and man within it, as that which "is beloved" moves things: but not "as that which *loves*." The gods, as men feel, "care for men": but *God* cannot. Both these men were too profoundly in earnest to suit Athens. Both left it and died at a distance. Practically every school of philosophy that

followed was but a modification of one or the other. We need mention only Epicureanism, which taught that everything consisted of "atoms" in motion; the gods, and the soul, consisting of specially "subtle" ones: and Zeno's Stoicism, which really used the word "God" as synonym for the "All." Cynicism, with its doctrine "Live according to Nature" (*i.e.*, instinct), marked the gradual change-over of philosophy towards being a "school of practical life" which, despairing of intellectual success, sought at least to show you how to behave properly in so confusing a world. It was by preference by this handle that the Romans, heirs to the Greek past, took hold of "philosophy."

## VI. THE END

But simultaneously with philosophy, which was human intelligence at its maximum strain, "religions" of a mystical sort were developing, such as Orphism and Pythagoreanism, which were, however, far from antipathetic to philosophy, since both Plato and Aristotle really ended up by saying that a "contemplation" of the divine, transcending not only sense but reasoning, was man's destiny, so much so that Aristotle's *Ethics*, which begin with a quite rationalist examination of the source and course of right behaviour, break off, so it seems to me, and end in downright ecstasy. Orphism, you may briefly say, transposed the old idea of union with the god (in this case, Dionysos) by way of ritual and even physical intoxication, into one of something called "holiness." You might have to pass through many a cycle of existence before full emancipation was reached. (Here, maybe, is a link with India. India, after the time of Alexander, played an increasing part, I cannot but hold, in western mystical developments, and affected Gnosticism itself). Your final cry was: "I have flown off from the deep-sorrowful, laborious circle," or wheel. (Yet it had been a spiral, not a mere ever-revolving circle). And the "saved soul" was hailed:

"Hail, thou that dost experience that which never aforetime thou didst—From man, thou art become a god." Yet Orphism, like everything else, led the living man by way of a ritual as grotesque and even sordid as any other was. Also, Pythagoreanism played its part. Here, instead of the whirling cycle of existences from which you at last flew off at the perfect tangent, you were, if "incurable," as Plato puts it, plunged into fathomless mire: else you underwent a purgatory till the last taint was rinsed out, and you became that quintessential fire to which Vergil will allude. Yet the contemporary "mechanism" of this process—venal purifications and quackery—was such as to lash Plato to absolute fury.

Enough to say that the degeneration of Greece, like its sensational development, was extremely rapid. Imitation succeeded almost at once to creation: good taste was the poor substitute for an unparalleled sense of beauty: cleverness was all that was left of a fierce pursuit of a Saving Wisdom. The outline of the Hellenistic period, as they call it (from 300, or 250 B.C. onwards), was at once florid and flaccid. It was, really, a moral collapse. We have not to be distressed about the coarse and violent sexualities of the earlier Greek ritual: probably the obscenity of the street-corner Herms made hardly any impression at all on the average passer-by. Practically all the rituals were formed with the utmost sincerity in very early days when people genuinely believed in the gods and were aware of their physical needs and never dreamed of trying to fulfil the latter without the help of the former. They expressed this fact in ways which were crude, and remained so. Our idealisation of the Greeks has gone much too far. Not only did the culture of each State repose on the existence of an enormous slave-population, but the flower of that culture was, in each case, produced by very few and withered almost at once. To describe even the Athenians as true "democrats" has always seemed to me a bad joke. It was bad enough when the small "free" minority claimed to legislate, each

and all : it was swept by every irresponsible gust of emotion and, in its frantic imperialism, thought nothing of ordering the massacre of a whole island-ful and then sending a contingent to countermand the atrocity. (This arrived, as such things always do, too late.) It is not Greek religions which have handed down anything of value to posterity, not even those chiefly exotic developments, the Mysteries. What we are grateful for consists in the few products of a brief period of Art, which we inherit chiefly in copies, and the work of Plato and of Aristotle, which the Church has been able to use, in varying proportions, during different parts of her history. We therefore refer readers on to St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas.



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All such books must be studied with great caution : they are usually the works of theorists, and evidence and hypotheses increase and differ rapidly.

# RELIGION OF EARLY ROME

By Rev. C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

Between 1500 and 1000 B.C., or earlier still, tribes of Indo-European origin descended into the future "Italy": probably the only tribe not of that origin was the "Etruscan." By mid-eighth century, "Romans" were settled on the Palatine hill by the Tiber; and another tribe, the Sabines (or Saffines) on the Quirinal. The local hills were then much steeper than they are, and separated by marsh-land: but finally the two communities united, and groups on other ridges joined them. The *pomærium* (enclosure-stockade) on the Palatine survived in ritual; but seven hills were at last encircled by the "Servian rampart" of which much remains. They were ruled by a "king," who was regarded as head of the whole community, priest, and chief magistrate.

No "history" can be made of the pastoral, then agricultural, life of these communities previous to their union; nor much, for some time afterwards. The Etruscans came south and dominated them till the dynasty of Tarquins (lords) was evicted in c. 509, and Rome became a "republic." The Tarquins had notably developed its material civilisation, though expansion had gone only south, along the Tiber. But now, Rome shrank: its history is practically that of the plebeians against the patricians—those who could display "fathers," *i.e.*, ancestors among the original settlers. Part of the gradual triumph of the "plebs" consisted in its obtaining the right to official worship though its members had no ancestral religious traditions or rituals.

Else, from our special point of view in this series, we need notice only the establishment of a Latin League (composed of communities descended neither from the Greeks, who had invaded the south, nor from Etruscans), and the ultimate supremacy, within the League, of Rome. By 250 B.C., we can safely say that Rome was supreme in Italy, Etruscans included.

Pyrrhus, from across the Adriatic, felt that his vocation was to check the African power of Carthage in the West. Carthage stood to him somewhat as Persia had to his true Greek ancestors. This involved his invasions of Italy. But Rome, having by now visualised "Italy," resisted and defeated this "Greek" invasion, and increasingly, from about 270 B.C., felt herself a Western as opposed to a Greek world.

But Carthage also felt that her vocation was westward and had her colonies in Spain. Carthage, being originally a colony from Phœnicia (whence "Punic"), meant to Rome not only "Greece" nor even "Africa," but the "East." Hence a new long agony of wars : but by 146, the final destruction of Carthage, Rome could feel herself mistress of the world, eastward and westward alike. We need not describe in detail Rome's provincial expansion in the East. This period of singular corruption ended when Octavianus (Augustus) took over the situation after the murder of his great-uncle Julius Cæsar in 44 B.C., and definitely as from 27 B.C.

But throughout the period covered by this essay, the Roman mind had been forming itself independently of soldiers, financiers, and politicians. It was a Roman mind, because the Romans were never truly anyone but themselves ; yet all these contacts with Etruscans, Greeks, and Orientals modified it as time went on. To these modifications, in the religious sphere, we must attend.

As for material evidence, we possess a number of Roman Calendars containing the names of ancient Roman feasts with explanatory notes : Ovid's "Calendar," or *Fasti*, published after 14 A.D. ; *On the Latin Language* and *On Agriculture*, by Varro, who wrote about 90 B.C., and of these the former quotes largely from the *Pontifical Books* (see p. 4) ; and from his *Ancient Lore, Human and Divine*, St Augustine and Tertullian quote much. Verrius Flaccus, tutor to Augustus's grandsons, annotated a "calendar" and produced a dictionary abridged by Festus in the second century. Many visitors to Rome noted, and commented on ancient rituals, e.g., Aulus Gellius, Nonius, Dionysus of Halicarnassus, Plutarch (let us say, between 25 B.C. to 80 A.D.).

## I

ROMAN writers, as a rule, interpreted their evidence askew. They wrote long after the earliest religion had disappeared : Roman ideas had been modified by what was really Greek or oriental ; and writers had developed the un-Roman foreign habit of explaining what they did not understand by means of "myths," or stories.

Modern writers, however, find it difficult to emancipate themselves from the methods of a generation ago. Then authors assumed a "religious evolution" everywhere ; and though they agreed about little else, took it for granted that religion had everywhere developed out of "sub-religion" of some sort. True, to-day these rigid systems have been badly injured : yet even Mr. Bailey (*Phases* : p. 110) can write : "Comparative religion has shown that it was the

normal tendency of animism to pass into polytheism." But this was not so : belief in vague spirits may pass into belief in individualised, "highly-coloured" spirits, but not into gods, least of all the "Great" gods or god. It is now realised that Sir J. G. Frazer begged the question when he stated that a period of "magic" preceded that of "religion" : no evidence for that is adducible : yet Mr. Bailey again can say (*e.g.*, p. 36) : "It is probable that magic, because the cruder, is in the history of most races the earlier" ; and Mr. Warde Fowler (*Religious Experience*) heads the chapter in which he deals with Magic : "The Threshold of Religion." Yet while magic is constantly interwoven with religion, it becomes important, as often as not, just when religion degenerates. We mention these two writers thus, because they wish to be on their guard against this very assumption : and we offer no apology therefore for beginning at once with "belief in spirits," not because even that is the "earliest" phase, if you *exclude* belief in gods ; but, because the evidence is richer and more manageable.

The Roman's world was populated with what he called *numina*. If the word "spirit" is too definite as a translation, the word "force" is too lacking in the notion of "intelligence." For these non-material existences knew what was happening and disliked being interfered with. But they need not be described as "malignant." That idea is due to the number of "averting" spells that survive, and these are due (i.) to the impression received by simple countryfolk that Nature on the whole resists you, and (ii.) because while you knew, vaguely, how you might please spirits (*e.g.*, by saluting a place where there might be one—a queer tree ; a source ; a cave), you did *not* know on how many occasions, or how, you might not have disregarded, intruded on, or offended one. For example, you *had* to cut down trees : but trees were full of *numina* ! Hence you offered apologies to the *numen* of a wood which you might be clearing, and gave it a boar as propitiation. Every imaginable act connected with agriculture or the pastoral life had its *numen* concerned with

it, and this already denotes a "specialisation" of the spirit—spirits might be concerned with animals, not grain; houses, not fields. They therefore, having been indeterminate—sexless, shapeless, nameless, without "history," began to evolve a "personality." But the Roman was robust, practical, unimaginative; created no stories about his *numina*; vague though "fairies" were, yet a Hans Andersen and a Grimm came to tell stories of them: a Rackham can illustrate books about them. The Roman made no mythology; produced no art; did not yet philosophise. However, once he tied down these mysterious agencies to a special field of action, naturally they obtained corresponding names. Nodotus watched over the swelling (*nodus*) of the grain: Volutina over the unfolding sheath; Patulena over its opening.

But the home was as important as the field; Kitchen and Nursery are places of everlasting interest. Cunina watched over the child in its cradle (*cuna*): Statana taught him to stand; Levana lifted him if he fell; Ossipaga fixed his bones. Iterduca sent you forth on your out-goings: Domiduca brought you home again. However, of late the existence of these "godlets" in early times has been disputed. We read their names chiefly in Varro (116–28 B.C.), who found them in pontifical registers—or rather, we find them chiefly in St Augustine, quoting them from Varro. The suggestion now is that the Roman priesthood about 250 B.C., in its desire to have everything cut and dried, and subdivided as far as it would possibly go, *invented* a great number of "indigitamenta," as they were called,<sup>1</sup> and made lists of them. Possibly the meticulous minds of Roman religious legalists did thus invent any amount of "titles" for the power which could energise in particular ways: but I should think that this was what *everybody* did, in an informal way, so that the simplest peasant who wanted to cry out for help to, or appease,

<sup>1</sup>This name used to be derived from *endo*, i.e., *in*, and *agere*, to energise; i.e., forces that had their sphere of action within definite limits: now scholars are inclined to take the word as meaning formulas of invocation, within which the correct name had at all costs to be mentioned.

some mysterious force that he felt to be active at the moment, would use some such name—for example, if (as he did) he wished to sweep away some hostile *numen* that might be slinking over his threshold, and called upon Deverra (*verrere*, to sweep) to assist him in his application of his broom, he could quite as well have called upon Deterga (*tergere*, to wipe) if his instinct led him to scrub his threshold rather than to sweep it. The real point is : (i.) However much the pontifical books may, later on, have multiplied, stereotyped, and codified these names, that *sort* of name existed immemorially : and the fact that it is all-but always an adjectival name denoting a function and requiring a noun preceding it which could *not* have been “numen,” neuter, for all the adjectival names are always masculine or feminine, is of immense importance (p. 16) : and (ii.) The Roman, whether or no “religious” in our sense, was at the opposite pole to the materialist : everything filled him with a sense of awe, as being indwelt by something more mysterious and powerful than itself and than himself, on which to some extent he depended. It was this sense of “awe” that he called “religio.”<sup>1</sup>

Of the spheres in which these Powers were especially operative, naturally the most important to each man was his home, which, before there were even villages meant his house, his farm, and the clearing within which it stood. In all huts, the *first* important point was the door (*ianua*), by which hostile men and spiteful spirits might enter. “Janus” therefore became the God of all beginnings, and when the beginning of the year was shifted backwards from March, the month was called January. But no less important in a home was the *hearth* ; the Greek word *ἑστία* is identical with the Latin *Vesta*, and her cult must have originated therefore before the Greek and Italian “peoples”

<sup>1</sup>The word is not derived from “re-ligare,” as though “religion” tied you up in scruples, etc. : but from “re-legere,” “to read again,” with reference presumably to the proper formula which, after a while, it was felt one ought to recite on each several occasion. The habitual attitude of the Roman was therefore not one of *fear* ; and Petronius was crassly confusing the notion of “fear” with that of “awe” when he wrote : “’Twas Fear that in the world first made the gods.”

divided off from the aboriginal Indo-European stock. So pure did the conception of the hearth-fire remain, that when statues were being made for the other gods, none was made for her. But if the hearth-flame cooked the family's food, the food had to be stored. This store was the "*penus*," and the Penates formed a definite yet quite amorphous group of *numina*, whose care was for *that* home. The *Lares*, constantly coupled with the Penates, formed another group of *numina*. I am inclined to think that their influence was rather over the people in the house, than the food or furniture, and extended also over the adjoining property which made one, so to say, with the house—all of it was "home": for not only was there a special "*Lar Familiaris*," a kindly spirit that guarded the entire "household" and even successive generations, but others were worshipped duly by members of adjoining properties; and the extremely elaborate cult that centred round boundary stones (*termini*) had, practically, to be in common, since the stone belonged to both properties, and householders periodically met there to worship.

Finally, the strange idea of the "*Genius*" must be noted. The word is connected with the idea of generation, and corresponded to the sense of something not quite ourselves that is within ourselves, and produces more far-reaching results than we should have expected. The notion *could* be reduced to meaning just the "self": "to indulge one's genius" meant, simply, to have a good time: but it also could be almost quite detached: you could, and should, worship the Genius of the home, of the father of its family, or of any particular place.

This general belief expressed itself, naturally, by exterior gestures, and in particular by feasts, which developed in number and in kind according to the circumstances of the Roman people.

In a sense I must anticipate by mentioning the god Mars, and by adding that so far as evidence goes he was worshipped all over Italy during the earliest period of which we know. His month, March, indicated the opening of the year, both for agriculture and war, and the year was counted, civically and religiously, as from this first of

months until the changes made by Julius Cæsar.<sup>1</sup> Mars, then, being concerned with vegetation at least as much as with war, was involved in two curious ceremonies during March. First, his "dancing" or "leaping" priests, the Salii, from March 1-24 went prancing round field or (later) town, beating ancient-shaped shields with spears. The notions involved are very primitive—by clashing metal you can scare away evil influences: by striking a thing (in this case, the earth, by stamping your feet upon it) you can provoke it into activity (in this case, rich vegetation). But in the other ceremony, a man, named for the occasion *Mamurius Veturius*, words still, I think, connected with *Mars* and *Vetus*, old, was beaten out of the enclosures. He will have represented the effete vegetation of the previous year, expelled to leave the New Mars free to energise. This rite can be linked up with similar ones all over the world—the expulsion of the Old Year, Sickness, Sin, etc. Sometimes a living man, or a condemned criminal, or a puppet, was considered to have had the collective sin of the past year as it were concentrated in it, and he, or the image, was ejected and destroyed. The Hebrew scape-goat belongs to this cycle of ideas. April (from the word *aperire*, to open) was the real "spring"-month: in it, at the Fordicidia on the 15th, unborn calves were sacrificed to provoke the growing of grain still in the womb of the earth: on the 19th, the Cerealia celebrated the *numen* Ceres (or Cerus: its sex was uncertain; the name is from the root *cre-are*: to create): this too was to foster and please the power that made things grow: on the 21st came the Parilia. Pales (again sexless) was the presiding numen of the sheepfolds. A long account of the ritual is preserved: the pens were garlanded; fires of straw, olive, and laurel sprinkled with sulphur were lit; the shepherd drives the flocks through these; begs pardon for his unwitting faults—if he has disturbed some sacred fountain, trodden on holy ground, used sacred

<sup>1</sup>This is why Sept., Oct., Nov., and December are still the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th months; July and August were called Quinctilis and Sextilis, 5th and 6th months, till Julius and Augustus gave them their own names.



branches for profane purposes. He then begs for prosperity—this order, “confiteor” and then petition, is the normal one—washes his hands in dew; partakes in the sacrifice of milk and millet-cake (wine was added when the vine was introduced into Italy); and himself leaps through the fire. All this was rather incongruously made official and civic when towns were built: after all, you don’t keep sheep in cities! But the conservative Roman never let anything slip; and it is perfectly characteristic that the Roman should thus treat a simple process of disinfection as nucleus for a religious ceremony. April 23 and 25 and 28 were the Vinalia (for the year’s wine-crop); the Robigalia averted red rust on the corn—this feast concerns us; for, the Popes could not prevent even Christians going out in procession on that day, so they ordered litanies to be sung during the procession, invoking prosperity for the year. This we still do; and the Floralia was a “flower-feast” and a time of license like our Flower-Carnivals.

In May came the Ambarvalia, when on three consecutive days a procession went round the fields (later, in the Amburbium, it went round towns). This too was tenaciously adhered to by the Christians, and the Church needed but to substitute, in so innocent a practice, litanies for the pagan invocations; the processions, however, were attached to the three days preceding Ascension-day, named “Rogation,” or Asking Days.

Enough, now, to mention the December Saturnalia (Sæturnus was a seed-spirit: *sata*, sown grain) which was the great popular holiday of the year; slaves were freed for the day; no business was done; presents were given. The gaieties proper to Christmas do not, however, descend from this, but from northern customs: nor have the Saturnalia anything to do with the fixing of the date of Christmas (*cf.* 15).

Now isolated farms very soon gathered into small communities, if only out of sociability and need for defence. Villages followed; townlets: Rome herself. What had happened in the farms happened even in the City. Rome too, had its Hearth and Temple of Vesta

with a Community of Vestal Virgins to guard the sacred fire. Strange little flame, that must never be suffered to perish, tended by the daughters of each house in those distant clearings! Then, when the farms coalesced into villages, and the villages into a "realm," under a little "king," the king's daughters guarded even more earnestly the central Hearth of the Community.<sup>1</sup> When there was no more a king, the Vestals still *had* to be "king's daughters." So they were all of them adopted as daughters of the pontifex maximus, who retained the title *rex sacrorum*, king of holy rites: he lived in the *regia*, or royal house, hard-by the Vestals' cloister, into which no man might ever enter. In all that concerned harvest festivals at Rome the Vestals were prominent. The mills were garlanded; millers' and bakers' donkeys too were decorated and paraded the town. The Vestals cooked the sacrificial cakes then used; and now that you can freely stroll around their thrice-sacred precincts you can see where they baked them; and even some petrified cakes have been dug up there. The festival, June 7-15, ended by another quite Roman detail. The accumulation of the year's refuse within the precincts was solemnly swept out and carried to the Tiber: and the graven Calendars bear the initials—Q.S.D.F., *Quando stercus delatum est, Fas*: When the refuse has been carried away the Feast is over.<sup>2</sup> So too the Lars had their community feast of the Compitalia at the cross-roads or junctions of boundaries: the Paganalia was the feast of a "village" (*pagus*); the Fornacalia was that of the communal ovens; the Septimontia signalled the extension of the City Rome to the area that included the seven hills; twice a year the shields of the Salii and the trumpets by which the people were summoned to listen to the public sanctioning of wills were solemnly purified.

<sup>1</sup>Presumably the men had the harder task of blowing the embers up, each morning, into flame: they were called "flamines" (*flare*, to blow): hence the Flamens of whom we speak below.

<sup>2</sup>In these calendars, N stands for *nefas* or *dies nefastus*, i.e., a holiday of obligation when no work might be done: F for *Fas*, i.e., a working-day: and NP for a day when only half of it was "holy"; for the remainder, you could work.

The Latin League (see p. 1 above) met in April on the Alban Mount : the president offered milk ; other deputies, cheese, sheep, etc. A white heifer was killed, and all the deputies ate part of its flesh. To lose one's share meant rupture of the tie which bound these civic units into a whole. The least error in the ritual (this held good for most, or all, Roman ritual) involved the repetition of the entire function. The elements of this ritual are "aboriginal" : they go back to the purest state of pastoral antiquity. The root-idea goes back even further. When sacrifice is offered, it is required that the offerers should personally partake in it ; this could be done either by eating part of it or smearing oneself with the sacrificial blood, or dressing in the animal's skin, etc. Recall how St Paul definitely regards Holy Communion as a sharing in the *Altar* (I. Cor. xiv. 21). By means of the ceremony on the Alban Mount, the Latin tribes recognised, and consolidated, their organic union.

Another civic rite was the Lupercalia, in February. *Februa* means objects or acts, that purify ; and February was a month full of such ritual cleansings. The Lupercalian ritual is too elaborate for us to describe it here, nor had all its details one origin. Its essence was that two chosen youths, naked but for the hides of goats killed on the Palatine, ran round that hill striking walls and women with strips torn from the same hide. Since these thongs were called *februa*, one part of their work was clearly purificatory : but also they struck prosperity into the town, and fertility into the women.<sup>1</sup>

We need further speak, now, only of the Dead. Antiquity never thought that a dead man ceased altogether to exist. His "soul" might go on living in his grave (hence gifts of food, or even armour, jewellery, cosmetics, razors, might

<sup>1</sup>The practice of throwing an old (leather) shoe after a bridal pair descends from this ritual. It is not true that Pope Gelasius (492-496) invented the feast of the Purification to oust the Lupercalia with its torch-light procession (Feb. 15, however, not Feb. 2). In fact, that feast was being kept in Jerusalem more than a century earlier, though oddly enough, on Feb. 15, i.e. 40 days after the eastern Christmas, Jan. 6. When the feast reached Rome, its date was altered to Feb. 2, 40 days from the western Christmas, Dec. 25.

be buried with him or periodically inserted into his tomb ; or animal, slave, or wife might be killed over it, so that the blood, carrying the life, might seep down to him) : or again, might blow about in the winds and appear, *e.g.*, in dreams : or, exist in some dim under-world, the mere shadow of its "self," and from time to time emerge. Souls did so on the days of the Lemuria, May 9, 11, and 13 : *Lemures* means ghosts in a vindictive or sinister aspect. They wanted food or even blood, and had to be got rid of. The father of each family had an elaborate ritual for preventing their invasion (see 13). A quite different ritual was that of the Parentalia, the All Souls week of Rome, when the State did for its dead what the family did for its own dead on their anniversaries. The "dead" were regarded as still living members of the community, as full of good will towards it as ever they had been in life. The *Ius Manium*, the regulated code of right behaviour towards them, became as definite a thing as the *Ius Civile* or *Ius Divinum* became. Relatives went out to the family tomb, offered honey, milk and oil, violets and roses, and partook of a simple meal in which the dead were held to share. They left, saluting the dead relative with the words : "*Salve, sancte parens !*"—Farewell, holy Father.<sup>1</sup> On the 22nd the whole family met once more at home in a common love-feast : places were set for the dead and the Penates : feuds were laid aside—for one day, at least, the departed, the living, and the gods dwelt peaceably in one large family. This was called the Caristia, or Cara Cognatio—feast of our Dear Ones, or of our Dear Kinsfolk. So holy was the week that temples were closed ; no marriage might be celebrated ; no business was done : all was postponed to the well-being of the dead.

<sup>1</sup>*Sanctus* meant consecrated rather than morally holy.

## II

I have now to touch upon three topics—Magic : Morality : and the Gods—about which conflicting opinions are held. Magic can be called a method of addressing yourself to nature or to God *without* any sense of dependence as regards the latter, or of proportionate sequence of cause and effect as regards the former. The examples will show what I mean.

There was (and still exists) a practice of forming a clay or wax image of your enemy and melting or piercing it or otherwise injuring it. Your enemy then suffered likewise. This was called *defixio*, nailing : indeed, to drive a nail through his *name*, carved on a tablet, could suffice. Many such tablets survive. One, beginning : " The eyes, hands (etc., etc.), money, profits, health of N., I, M., nail to this tablet." Another : " I chain Vettia's awareness, thoughts, etc., etc., so that she may love me, Felix." A betting curse is scandalous enough, but amusing : " I adjure thee, spirit, whoever thou art, and demand from thee as from this hour and this day and this moment, that thou torment and kill the horses of the Greens and Whites, and slay and smash up the drivers Clarus (etc.), and leave no breath in them." There were also medicinal charms or weather-charms, usually accompanied by an incantation which (like the spells of latter-day witches or conjurers) made no sense, but consisted of odd and assonant syllables (*e.g.*, Huat hauat huat ista pista sista . . . etc.). The State early objected to these individualistic practices, but it too retained an immense amount of ceremony which had completely lost any meaning ; the Arval Brothers, for example, did not understand the sense of the prayers they chanted. Had the prayers been abolished, old people and even contemporary folks might have felt, for a while, uncomfortable ; but they would have adapted themselves the more easily since they had no intellectual conviction as to the meaning of the prayer and were not always quite sure what the proper ritual was. I need hardly dwell on the wearing of amulets or placing, *e.g.*, wreaths as charms over doors (as we do horse-shoes). Finally, there were

whole categories of things which might *not* be done (taboo) either by anyone, or by certain persons. Women, or aliens, were excluded from many a ceremony. Iron was often taboo (this dates from the time when there was none, or when it was so rare as to be "uncanny" and not to be touched with impunity). Certain places were forbidden (*e.g.*, where lightning had fallen); certain days were unlucky: and as for the Flamen Dialis, priest of Jupiter, his life must have been intolerable. Every day for him was a "feast": on actual feasts he must never even *see* a man working; he must never look at an army in arms. His hair must be cut only by a free man with a bronze knife; his nail-parings must be buried under a lucky tree; he must not touch wheat—that "recent" introduction into Italy; nor so much as mention a goat or dog or ivy or raw meat (all of which were associated with funeral-rites) nor wear a ring (save broken) or have any knot about his clothing (both of these were felt as hampering the free exercise of what we should call his "consecrated personality").

We repeat, *no* period has been discovered when there was *only* magic and *no* religion. The two are always intertwined. It is, then, begging the question to say that magic came first. We have therefore no right, when we find (nearly always) that some spirit is mixed up with a magical spell, to say that the "spirit" entered the transaction only as an after-thought. Further, it is certain that magic lasted (and lasts) into periods when religion has reached a high state of development, and even has revivals then and finds new forms for itself, precisely as a counterblast to religion (the Black Mass could not have come into existence till the belief in and worship of the Blessed Sacrament was general and intense). Finally, Dr. Schmidt has shown that the incidence of magic coincides with the degeneration of religion, and never was there so violent an outbreak of witchcraft in our northern lands as when, after the Reformation, religion was disintegrating.

We have, also, to eliminate from what is strictly "magical" those acts which are merely exterior gestures expressing an idea. The Roman always expressed his ideas exteriorly. If an estate was being argued about, a sod of turf was brought into court, and whenever the estate was mentioned, it was touched. Hence I eliminate from "magical" material all those incidents connected with stones (whether boundary stones, meteorites, etc.) rituals concerned with which fill pages in our books about ancient religions. We need never regard such rites as devoid of reference to *numina* or gods; and again, it is wanton to assume that *at first* no such

reference was intended. We are nearer the truth when we put down magical rituals to a sense of inferiority on the part of the "witch"—as when an old crippled woman wants at all costs to have *some* sense of power over ordinary people ; or to terrific pride, when such a man has achieved his position and wishes to adorn, maintain or increase it. Such is the situation of the witch-doctor in Africa, who "smells out" the witch, by means of "secret knowledge" of his own, which makes him the most feared and therefore the most powerful person in the locality. This is why such persons *invent* even perfectly meaningless formulas—"omne ignotum pro terribico": the unknown frightens you. Hence no one has any right to assume that a "magical" period was previous to a "religious" one : and as for Sir J. G. Frazer's idea that "magic" was the earliest form of science, as though it was experimenting to see what causes produced what effects, that is so alien to the psychology of early tribes that it is now generally discarded.

What then is Magic? It is an attempt to produce results beyond actual human powers by methods due to the mood of the magician. A man may come to believe that he can do certain things independently of the gods, or even in defiance of them. He may reach a point at which he thinks he can even coerce them. Such a mood can come about in any level of civilisation. It existed during the Renaissance ; during the later monarchy and the empire in France : it exists now, less, I should say, among uncultured folks than among sophisticated people who have exhausted the normal thrills. The difference between magic and religion lies chiefly in the mood of the agent.

At the other extreme, can we affirm that at the period, in which "*numina*" were so significant, there were no "gods"? Certainly not. Again, we cannot discover, historically, a period in which gods and *numina* did not co-exist. We have already mentioned Mars. It is arbitrary to suggest that Mars "grew out of" a *numen*. What is especially interesting about him is, that when at last the Romans built temples, his temple was not allowed inside the city enclosure. I take it that he was directly concerned with all that went on *outside* the enclosure—that is, agriculture (his original sphere of action), and war. When, under Greek influence, he settled down into being a war-god, all the more must he be excluded from within the City, where unanimity was supremely needed. But

besides him, there was Jupiter, the ubiquitous and immemorial "sky-god," who, alone of gods, earned the title Optimus Maximus, All-good—All-great.

It is not my business to prove here that there have been no "atheist" peoples. It does not follow that a tribe believed in no supreme God at the back of all other spiritual existences because it *wrote* nothing about him (usually it could not write); or said nothing about him (he might be too sacred to be named—even the Jews took roundabout methods for alluding to God); or had no cult for him (he was above forms of human worship). It would then be a serious anthropological error to suggest that the Romans, Latins, or Italians generally ever had a period when they worshipped *numina* and neither believed in nor worshipped any God. Now Jupiter (along with Vesta alone) has a name identical with that by which the Greeks named Zeus (see 13),<sup>1</sup> and Hestia; and therefore, as Mr. Bailey, for example, at least twice allows, was worshipped before the Indo-European stock divided itself, in Europe, into Greek and Italian. Therefore when the future Italians entered the peninsula, they arrived *in possession of* Jupiter-worship: and therefore, during the many centuries of *numina*-"worship," they were also worshipping a supreme God, little as they may have said about him. Yet, given that the immigrants arrived already worshipping "Jupiter"; and allowing that it would have been abnormal had they not recognised some sort of supreme God, why should it follow that this *supreme* God was "Jupiter"? First, and negatively, there is no rival. Mars is the only other generally worshipped "Italian" god; but Mars was specialised: he was concerned with field-work and war: Jupiter was forthwith *able* to be universal, being the god of the "bright sky" which arches over everything. Hence I surmise that the Italians progressively found that their notion of a supreme nameless deity was *more easily* expressed by "Jupiter" than by any other god whose name they knew, and even so, this implies that they arrived in Italy much more

<sup>1</sup>Diovis-piter, Father Diovis; is the same as the Greek Dieus, Sanskrit Dyauś.



retarded so far as "theology" went than their cousins the Greeks were when they entered what was to become Greece, also from the north. For the Greeks brought with them a fully-fledged Zeus, whatever else may have been their local or tribal cults. Moreover, while Mars was the god of the earliest settlement on the Palatine, Quirinus was the military god of the corresponding settlement on the Quirinal hill : but Jupiter was common to them both, and supreme in this earliest triad of Roman Gods. Indeed, when *all* the Latin tribes met on the Alban Mount and renewed their mutual fraternity there and kept there the *Feriae Latinæ*, it was Jupiter Latiaris who presided over the *whole*. His earliest titles were no doubt connected chiefly with the sky—Fulgur (thunderbolt) : Lucetius (of light) : Summanus (of night-lightning). He was, too, "Pluvius," a god who sent rain ; and the *lapis manalis*—dripping-stone (apparently a hollowed stone into which water was poured till it overflowed)—was connected with him. In proportion as Roman life became urbanised, so did the cult of Jupiter : he was Victor, Conqueror : Stator, Stayer of Rout : Feretrius, Carrier-off of Spoils. In proportion as Rome swallowed up the Latin communities, the Temple on the Capitol eclipsed all other temples, and Jupiter Optimus Maximus absorbed his other cults.

As for the "named gods" of this early period, I have to add only Juno, who was, not so much a pale counterpart of Jupiter, but of the Genius of Women especially, so that she was naturally connected with marriage and childbirth. She followed, at a considerable distance, a course parallel to Jupiter's, and ended as his wife and Queen of the people and Saviour (*Sospita*) of the State.

I would then sum up by insisting that we must not expect clean-cut philosophical ideas in such a period. You get one hint from the fact that the names of the *Numina* are practically all *adjectival*. To what noun are they adjectival ? By all analogy, "*pater*." "*Divus Pater Vaticanus*"—Divine Father of Speech (you invoked him to make your child's first word propitious). Since then history does not show us a multitude of *numina* coalescing into one god, but does show us an ever-increasing number

of *numina* expressive of divine *functions*, we have far better reason for conjecturing (even if we cannot prove) the belief in a universal, supreme, vague, nameless, often unworshipped deity, whose manifold activities became, slowly in Rome, completely and almost at once in Greece, specialised and personified. Therefore so far as the Romans (Italians) go, to look no further, there is no evidence for believing in a magical, then an animist, finally a "theologic" phase : and Mr. Bailey himself (p. 36) declares that he is not describing "an historical development but rather a logical series of phases, as we see them, which, as far as we can tell, always existed together in anything that could be called the religion of the Romans or even of the Latins." That is excellently put : the "series" is arranged by the student in his study, and corresponds with nothing (so far as evidence goes) that actually happened.

### III

Let us allow that the animist religion we described existed intact up to about—shall we say, 600 B.C. It is still too much the fashion to declare that such a religion could have nothing to do with morality. It is supposed to have been a mere affair of *contract* : "I exist ; gods exist : I do what I ought towards them ; I expect them to do what they ought towards me." Only, you could not but be more in awe of the gods than of your fellow-man. "Religion and fear," said Servius, commentating Vergil, "are intimately connected" ; and he (wrongly but significantly) derives the word *deus*, god, from the Greek *deos*, fear. Now the attitude of the early Roman towards the objects of his worship was not fear, but "*pietas*," which means, dutiful respect. To neglect your part of the contract was "impious" ; to overstep it, was *superstitio*. True, individualistic religion was discouraged : the father was the priest for his own family ; a priestly caste grew up only when townships did. Slaves were allowed to celebrate a collective feast only once a year. But however much the family was a unit, its components are not, for that, individ-

uals any the less; and each had his religious reaction. Still, what sort of a reaction was that? Always a practical one. "Our ancestors," said Servius, on Vergil's picture of a shepherd idly praying for his fields without working, "put the whole of religion in *doing things*," Aulus Gellius said that "in their dealings with the gods, as in all other duties of life, they were *cautissimi et castissimi*—most "careful and exact." If they invoked Jupiter Optimus Maximus, they were apt to add: "or by whatever other name you prefer to be called": if the *numen* was altogether vague, they added: "whether you be god or goddess—male or female." You did not say: "I offer thee wine"—that was again too vague; it might imply your whole cellarful: you prepared a cup, touched it, and said: "With *this* wine, I sacrifice to thee." All-but synonyms were piled up, lest any loophole for misunderstanding should be left.

But what was being sought was the *pax deorum*—the active harmonious good will between all concerned: "I have paid my vow with right good will," said the Roman, "as was fitting." There was not emotion—ecstasy—wild superlatives: everything was done "fittingly," but with good will, almost genially. "A sober cult," says the Christian Tertullian, approvingly. A men's religion, rather than women's? Yet the *matrona* was in high respect; the chastity of the daughter was more precious than life itself, and the Vestals, at the very centre of Roman worship, symbolised that. But the ideals of *staying power*: good faith especially, duty, discipline, mutual regard and respect—all this was proper to that early age, however abrupt might be the flare-up of passions, raids, rapes, and all such simple sins for which the gods without doubt had to be appeased. Yet long afterwards, the historian Polybius could still write that while the sacredness of a single Roman promise sufficed to make the return of your deposit absolutely certain, no amount of precautions or witnesses or oaths would ever enable you to get back what once you had entrusted to a Greek. And the poet Propertius, soaked in Greek mythology, turns from the amours of gods, the normal origin of some Greek

clan or town, and exclaims that at any rate history " need not blush for *thy* annals, Rome " !

But in proportion as the immigrant " Italians " stabilised themselves, their " mind " developed, and did so, inevitably, about their " religion." The change is usually described as one from *numina* into gods : but not all *numina* became gods : and there is nothing to show that all gods were once upon a time mere *numina*. We cannot tell what line of development the Roman (or even Latin) religion might have taken had it been left to itself. But it was not. Etruria was a non-Latin " enclave " in Italy, north of Rome ; and the south had long been populated with Greeks. The Etruscans are thought to have been an Asiatic race strongly affected by the Greek settlements in Asia. They arrived therefore with religious assets of their own (which seem to have been sombre, even cruel, and much connected with the future life), and also, an art influenced by the Greeks which caused them to regard their gods much more in human shape than the Romans did. When they became important and conquered Rome they influenced not only architecture, but the purposes to which architecture was applied : the temple of Jupiter Latialis (p. 10), and even the temple of Jupiter Capitoline were Etruscan both in idea and in design. The latter was dedicated by the first consul of the republican era in Rome, 509 B.C., and thereafter, the gods went on being housed within walls and a roof, instead of being worshipped under the sky, by source or tree.

Images, naturally, followed the temples : a terra-cotta one of Jupiter, allegedly from Etruria, was installed along with Juno and Minerva on the Capitoline, and its scarlet cheeks were sedulously imitated by " triumphant " generals when they entered Rome. Contact with other Latin cities introduced the Romans to new gods or goddesses not too unlike their own, such as Diana, who lived in a grove at Aricia, and Venus, a goddess of garden-produce, from Ardea. But some of these cities had already been in commercial contact with the Greek cities in the south, like Tarentum, and from them had absorbed Greek deities like Kastor and Polydeukes and again Herakles, whose names

were Romanised into Castor, Pollux, and Hercules : the last actually retained the Greek method of worship, with head uncovered—the Romans always veiled their heads when praying. "In the temples," says Quintilian, "we compose our feelings ; we keep even our thoughts silent."

The Romans even *sent for* foreign gods—*dii novensiles* as contrasted with their own *dii indigetes*—at crises, when their own seemed unhelpful. It was probably during some pestilence that Apollo as god of healing was called in : so obviously foreign, he was kept in his proper place, outside the circuit of the walls ; but he was worshipped with full Greek ritual, and no one ever identified him with any Italian god. Nor in fact did he have any great success till Augustus (see 15) took him up as patron of arts, music especially, and poetry.

Unfortunately, a rather vulgar method of worship came in with the foreign gods : the *lectisternium*. The idea of offering food to the gods was ancient, whatever may have been the idea that lay behind it. But that food was burnt or otherwise consumed, and no scenic apparatus had been used. But now, couches were spread before a table, and the images of the gods, in triads or couples, even Greek and Roman mixed, were offered food, and the crowds filed before them. When there was a service of supplication or thanksgiving, the whole population, led by magistrates, went in procession from couch to couch, displaying a totally un-Roman and unhealthy sort of emotion.

After the second Punic War (201) the poet Licinius himself was clear-sighted enough to see that Greek literature itself swept into the masculine Roman world and submerged it. But before I relate the effects of this I wish to insert a parenthesis upon the Roman notion of "omens," of augury, and divination.

When you are really anxious to please God, naturally you are on the look-out for such signs of God's will as you can observe. Incidentally, when you very much want such a sign, and can find none, you are inclined to "see" one where none is, or even half-consciously to invent one. You are the more likely to do this if you are a man with a reputation of being able to do this as a rule successfully.

Thus mediums "cheat" when no "manifestation" occurs. The Roman methods of ascertaining the will of the gods was by examining the entrails of sacrificial animals and the flight or cry of birds and, after Rome got involved with Etruria and Greece, by interpreting thunder and lightning. Conceivably there may have been a "rationalist" origin for these methods—e.g., the good condition of the entrails may have shown that the animal was fit to be offered to the gods; but on the whole I assume that the mere fact that birds can fly, and that we can't, sufficed to make them mysterious, "heavenly," and meaningful; the normal invisibility of entrails made them seem "odd." Now the Roman, in his love for order and dislike for the unexpected or irresponsible, objected to "private divination" because anyone might go about seeing signs and creating untold confusion.<sup>1</sup> A *ius augurale* grew up alongside of the *ius divinum*, the latter "code" dealing strictly with religion, the former with "augury," both ultimately taken over by the State. I do not imply that there was not an authorised code of *family* augury—authorised just because it was traditional in the family and performed by its head. But this is different from wandering quackery.

In State affairs, this preliminary finding-out what was the will of heaven naturally fell to Officials. Two, or three, auspices (*avi-spices*—lookers-at-birds) sat beside the king, or magistrate, or general, and did no more than interpret to the official the meaning of the signs that he asked or saw. Their lore was preserved in books, all of which were kept secret and have not survived. It matters little: the right to look for auguries belonged wholly to the civil authority, and this authority finally swallowed up all that had ever been religious in this department and most of religious practice in all the others.

<sup>1</sup>The exact opposite held good in Greece; save for certain tremendous oracles (see 13), divination was practically all private. For private soothsayers (like our advertised palmists, etc.) the Romans used the word *hariolus*: *hariolari* ended by meaning to talk mere moonshine.

## IV

So long as the family remained the real nucleus of social life, respected alike by its members and the government, all went fairly well. The virtues of hard work, honesty, fidelity to one's word, courage, frugality, a true appreciation of chastity, and an individual conscience convinced of right and wrong—all this existed, and survived for so long that the religion of those "pagi" or country-districts (whence "paganism") provided a much better terrain for the Christian seed than did the sophisticated, "civilised" towns. All the same, social laws operate, and it is inevitable that smaller groups should coalesce, and create a "State" whose officials, willy-nilly, end by wishing to have a finger in every pie.

Very early, a group called the "pontifices" existed: the name strictly signifies "bridge-makers," and the name, by one of those accidents owing to which names *do* spread, may well have spread to anyone who did work at once religious and of civic value.<sup>1</sup> Now bridge-making was of the highest importance to the community on the Tiber, and was a special and invaluable craft: also, like everything Roman, it was enwrapped in religious significance; peculiar ceremonies to the end belonged to the ancient Pons Sublicius—no iron, for example, might be used in its construction. In Christian times, chapels were built on bridges long before St John Nepomucene became their patron; and till very late there were sacrifices or at least burials of children in the middle of bridges, so mysterious was a bridge to the helpless shore-man. The College of Pontiffs remained self-elective till 104 B.C., and did not even admit plebians into itself till 300 B.C. Enough to say that at first a *crime* was always a *sin*, and in fact remained so in the sense that it had to be expiated lest the violated *pax deorum* should retaliate and hurt the whole community. But it was the pontifices alone who knew how to accomplish these expiations.

<sup>1</sup>The name "Greek" somehow established itself as proper to a whole race, though it was really that of a totally insignificant little tribe.

A department which was obviously civic in one sense was Marriage, and again, Inheritance. But for a girl to pass out of her family into another meant that she abdicated her family *sacra* and took on a different set ; and if there was no male heir (as after a war there well might not be) a son must be adopted, and he too must take up a new set of family *sacra* and resign his own. The latter were not exactly jilted ; but at least demanded a certain compensation. How to arrange such things only the Pontiffs knew. But the publication of the Twelve Tables, containing both the civil and the " canon " law (as we might now say), removed at least the secrecy in which the Pontiff's prerogatives were kept ; yet all the same both civil and divine law had, till 366, no one save the experienced pontifices to interpret them and show how they should be applied.

The reason why there never was a complete split between civil and " canon " law in ancient Rome such as there afterwards was in Europe, was double. Apart from the fact that the pontifices became as it were official annalists of such events as concerned Rome and her dominion, we see that they themselves took up secular offices as they had never done before—rather as if St Thomas à Becket had remained Chancellor when he became Archbishop. Further, the Romans never abandoned the practice of having a sort of religious parallel alongside of any important civic or social event, so that the more Italy became a kind of confederation within which Rome increasingly held the leadership, an enormous amount of extra work was put on the pontifices in the matter of adjusting the relationships between the various gods and ceremonies concerned. The Romans never had the least inclination to disbelieve in, or be impolite to, deities belonging to other peoples, though naturally they demanded that the worshippers of those gods should show equal respect, at least, to the true Roman ones. It has even been argued that the pontifices had some positive and constructive ideas, if one can judge from their having built at least four temples to ancient agricultural deities and others to deities connected with water between 272 and 241 B.C. Had they a *policy*



about tillage and irrigation? We can in fact detect, during this period, an immense work of religious "codification" going on, which became at least so top-heavy that even the minute regulations of the Scribes in Palestine could hardly surpass it. The burden became, finally, intolerable.

## V

Now just at the time when the Romans were beginning to build temples in honour of all sorts of abstractions—Honour; Manliness; Good Faith; Youth (as patron of young soldiers), there was a curious reaction in favour of the "old religion" and in particular of its more mechanical and portentous side. Since about 400 B.C., "Sibylline books," or at least Sayings, had existed in Italy: no doubt they came from the Hellenised south, Cumæ in particular, and since they interpreted portents and also gave direction as to what ought to be done, they proved very useful for political fraud, since they were secret, and anything could be inserted into them if an important official could "persuade" the aged "Sibyls" to do so. But this would take us too far from our point, which is, that when Hannibal began to look as if he were going to conquer the whole of Italy, portents broke out right and left, religious waves of excitement swept over that terrified populations, and the Sibylline books were officially consulted. What was ordered was entirely on Greek lines: the pageantry of processions and "lectisternia" was increased: human victims—foreigners, it is true—were buried alive. In fact, after the disaster of Cannæ, an embassy was actually sent to the oracle of Delphi (217-6) which had a quieting effect for a short time; religious panic, however, broke out anew, and, the Sibylline books having by now lost their thrill, Etruscan haruspices (much the same as auspices) were called in. The interminable war, coupled with the fact that 80,000 men were said to have fallen at Cannæ, broke down not only the barriers between official and family religion, and private excesses, but let hysterical women loose even in the Capitol.

Hasdrubal was killed in 207, and Rome, State and people, went as wild with gratitude to heaven "as if the war were actually finished" (Livy). However, it was not: Hannibal remained. All the Græco-Roman gods had been appealed to: perhaps the Sybilline books could suggest something new. They could. Let The Great Mother be brought from Phrygia, and Hannibal must leave. The order was given in 205: the goddess was brought: Hannibal left in 202.

She was a black stone, and lived at Pessinus: its king, Attalus, let her go reluctantly: she came in a special ship; grounded at Ostia, but was at once re-floated by a woman whose chastity had been suspected but who thus proved her innocence. Honourable women carried the goddess into Rome, and housed her in the temple of Victory till she obtained her own in 191. But by now authority must have been sorry they had invited her. Frantic processions swept the streets; cymbals and tambourines, the hoarse Phrygian horn and shrieking pipe accompanied them; the goddess passed, swaying on an enormous throne; *galli*, emasculated youths, and devotees in towering head-dresses, slashing themselves with knives, cantered deliriously around her. Rome had never seen anything like *that*. No doubt the Stone went home again; but the goddess remained in her temple surrounded with suitable games, *lectisternia*, and banquetings; a yearly feast was instituted, the *Megalesia*: only, no Roman citizen was allowed to take part in the processions, to hold any priestly office under the goddess; above all, none was allowed to become a *gallus*—even a slave who had done so was deported and forbidden ever to return to Rome. Rome was right to fear this exotic, erotic, and sanguinary cult. But the precedent had been given.

Essay No. 13 has described the orgiastic cults of Dionysus. These, having filtered through into Etruria and having received there, I suspect, a more sinister and criminal character, and also into Campania, where they developed fantastic immoralities rather than blood-guiltiness, finally reached Rome. At first confined to women and celebrated only thrice yearly, soon they admitted men and became

frequent. A whole "second population" was to be seen rushing to the Tiber, frenziedly waving torches. The consuls, appalled, went to the Senate; the magistrature received vast powers; the cult must be exterminated. Here too, then, it is the civil power that is seen regulating "faith and morals"; the cult was called by no name corresponding to "heresy"—it was a *coniuratio*, a conspiracy against the State, or at least the moral well-being of the State. Most of the Decree concerning this survives; it has one astonishing paragraph. Should a man feel bound in conscience to follow the new cult, he might do so, but only after applying to the prætor, who in turn would appeal to the Senate (not less than 100 senators must be present); then, if permission were given, the rites might be celebrated, but with not more than five persons present, nor might there be a common fund, nor any permanent priest. This civic care for Conscience seems quite remarkable.

These events are always described as the influx of "emotion" into Roman Religion. But emotion never was absent from it. How could it be? Even the Romans were human. What now arrived was a *bad sort* of emotion; or rather, *emotionalism*, *i.e.*, the search for emotion for its own sake, and the removal of all control from emotion. Controlled emotion is a very good thing. One reason why the new cults had so violent a success was that a dreadful longdrawn anxiety had been removed; the frightful "war-time" pressure was lifted off every soul; and once the stopper is removed it is difficult to put it in again. The new exotic cults will be seen in full eruption under the Empire: enough to add that other cults, especially Asiatic (probably introduced by the soldiery which was now being pushed about all over the world), and Egyptian—Egypt always impressed everybody—did their best to come in: in 105, an altar to Serapis occurs at Puteoli; and where he was Isis was sure to be—as from 58, altars to her on the Capitol itself were being destroyed by public authority. The genuine Roman sincerely objected to these "foreign" worships, which got such a hold on women: poets did so too, because the worship of Isis

involved women in periodical spells of chastity. Enough to say that emotion, unless governed by a strong dogma and moral law, and even periods of any kind of abstinence based on recurrent explosions of self-mortification and not on a permanent reasoned ideal, breed complementary excesses.

This outburst of emotionalism would not have sufficed to bring the Roman Religion down into the dust, if only because the growing sense of "Rome" as a State, and indeed a world-State, with a Government which must not be interfered with by anything extraneous to itself, would so have canalised the emotional cults as to make them harmless to the community. But two main bridges were constructed by which, despite the politicians, both ordinary folks and thinking men could stray into quite new worlds. One was Art; the other, Philosophy. Greek literature, especially poetry and drama, were being freely translated into Latin, incidentally killing what should have been an indigenous Roman poetry and play-writing at least till its curious resurrection in Christian times. As it was, the Greek spirit came to Rome with all its levity, irreverence, lasciviousness, and scepticism, but with none of its charm or delicacy to which Roman nerves were still unsusceptible. The Greeks could laugh at the stories about the gods without exactly mocking at the gods themselves. The Roman could not do that. And when crowded theatres listened to Plautus (*d.* 184 B.C.) reducing divine figures to the level of drunkards or wantons or sly servants, and even to Terence (*d.* 159), too polished to be popular, treating them no less materialistically, the ancient sentiment of awe fainted away; what had been holy was burlesqued; what had been godlike proved farcical.

The poet Ennius (*d.* 169) was also a philosopher, and, as poet, a supreme genius. As philosopher, he was not original. But he translated, for example, the "Sacred History" of Euhemerus, where the gods were set forth as half-forgotten, myth-transfigured men; the poem in which Epicharmus explains them as mere allegories of natural phenomena.

But while real philosophy made but little difference to

the Roman, who disliked abstract thought, we have at least to mention the systems of Epicureanism and of Stoicism (see 15), which arrived in Rome towards the end of the period of which in this paper we are speaking. Epicureanism considered the world to be constructed of "atoms," infinitesimal solids, hurtling along in a vacuum, clashing and coalescing without discernible cause, and forming thus the various objects that we see around us. The "soul" was composed of very delicate atoms, incapable of surviving their extraction from the body; there was therefore no "future life." The gods existed in a serene sphere of their own, but took no heed whatsoever of lower things, such as mankind. All this was superbly embodied by Lucretius (*d.* 55?) in his poem on *Nature*; but, as Cicero well said: If the gods take no interest in human affairs, there is no room left for duty or sacredness or pious awe in their regard, nor for prayer or devotion. Moreover since Epicurus advised men to seek "pleasure," *i.e.*, the sense of well-being due to perfect interior balance, you may well imagine that the practical Roman accepted no such subtle interpretations of what meant to him just enjoyment. Nor was he likely to appreciate Lucretius's suggestion that it was good to worship the gods because it was pacifying to contemplate serene notions.

Mr. Warde Fowler thinks that Stoicism, as taught by Panætius from Rhodes and afterwards by Posidonius, a Syrian, exercised a deep and "religious" effect upon the upper and ruling classes, especially on Scipio Aemilianus (184-129) who was also in contact with the historian Polybius. I fear I cannot agree with this, despite the nobility of Panætius's version of Stoicism and his long intimacy with Scipio. The essence of Stoicism was that the Universe was ruled by an immanent mind, in which all men participated; in which the more one participated the better; with which one *must* ultimately identify one's self—then all would be well till the universe collapsed in flames and began anew. Somewhat as the true Epicurean did not teach mere sensual pleasure, so neither did the Stoic teach what we mean by "stoicism," *i.e.*, apathy in face of all sense-impressions pleasurable or painful. It

taught that we should not be diverted by pain or pleasure from this harmonising of one's self with the Whole. And no doubt, for lack, I am sure, of a better word, and in order not to create worse havoc by denying God than by explaining him away, Stoics were willing to call this All-in-all *God*. What, however, the Stoics could never get out of was an ultimate pantheism in which, however, there was no god, so that really one ought to call it Pan-ism; All-ism—to coin two words: and again, that in a quite inexplicable way the All is diminished, fractional “in” all subordinate things though least of all (because of his reasoning power) in man—a notion as inexplicable as Lucretius's statement that his atoms would suddenly causelessly *swerve* and *therefore* coalesce; and finally, that the *best* man could do was to submit himself to the control of the Power in things, so that he would get to his goal anyhow, like a dog tied beneath a cart, whether or no he struggled. What looked, then, so like a philosophy of will turned out to be one of fatalism.

The reason why I cannot attribute even to Stoicism the importance, in Republican Rome, that some modern writers attribute to it is that I feel convinced that English writers especially have painted on to the Roman canvas their own ideal of that English statesmanlike liberalism, heir of a Protestantism from which all dogma had been discarded. True, the ethical ideal was nobler than it had been—but even these ideals of civic and personal probity and so forth existed chiefly in conversations, lectures, or pamphlets, and, again, the Governing Class had not any intention of allowing either philosophy or religion to interfere with what was opportune; and in fact the actual corruption of Roman administration, especially in the provinces, was unbelievable. No: the philosophical “uplift” was not more than the cultured occupation of a clique: little by little the common people had forced its way into the great religious positions hitherto held only by patricians, and so they arrived devoid of all those ritual traditions which the great families had inherited, and three-quarters of the “cult” was meaningless to them from the outset. And even those nobles or officials who

carried on the immemorial state-cult had ceased to believe in most of it. Auguries and the taking of auspices were regularly used, but they were dead wood by now. Common sense dealt easily with them. Since the *seeing* of an omen, not the omen itself, was important, Cicero reminds us that Marcellus, whenever he wanted to go anywhere, drew the curtains of his litter *lest he should* see something to prevent him. Casuists grew clever: since it was forbidden to bathe cattle on no-work days, the law was pulled round so as to permit you to bathe *sick* cattle, and then amplified so that you might bathe cattle *lest they should fall* sick. You were allowed to continue work already begun, even on a no-work day, lest it should deteriorate: soon you might even begin a work on such a day, lest by not doing so some disaster might befall. Bibulus, who had quarrelled with his colleague Julius Cæsar, "saw omens" whenever Cæsar wanted to begin some political act: Augurs "heard thunder on the left" when it had not thundered at all: even in Cato's time we are told that no two haruspices could look at one another without laughing. When such was the general state of mind it is certain that the Stoic theory about the validity of omens drawn from examining sacrificial entrails could carry no weight. The Universal and Divine Order, it was argued, being reflected in greater or less degree in all parts of the universe would be bound to express itself, more or less, even in those entrails.

As a matter of fact, the gentlemen who composed the "circle of Scipio" were sceptics, however much they liked to argue. Scipio himself was a shrewd and unimpassioned statesman, liberal and conciliatory. It is true that he liked Panætius and kept him at his side, and probably felt all the better for his conversation, but he agreed that you'd better "keep God out of business," business being politics. Polybius said frankly that "mystic terrors and all that sort of dramatic *mise en scène*" were invented "to keep the masses in hand." Lucilius was a satirist who ridiculed religious forms as bitterly as he did his fellow-men. When Cicero suggested that it would be *awkward* to deny the existence of the

gods, a Pontiff agreed, so far as public life went : " but in private conversation we can discuss freely." Scævola, pontifex maximus (*d.* 82 B.C.) distinguishes the religion of the Poets, the religion of Philosophers, and the Religion of the State. With regard to the stories of the first and the arguments of the second, one could please oneself ; the third must be respected at all costs.

Most of what we know of these men we get from Cicero, the last great name of the Republic (*d.* 43). It is often forgotten how impressionable a man he was. Hence one is apt to take his statements as radically sincere, whereas they express rather the mood of the moment. Thus, when he writes about his little daughter who had died, hardly ever does a glimmer of hope illumine his horizon ; though at moments, when possibly the Stoic doctrine, which could be stated so as to seem to allow room for personal immortality, was moving him, or when a breath of the semi-mystical Pythagoreanism of southern Italy was reaching him, he imagines her as divine rather than dead ; and wishes that a shrine, not a sepulchre, be built above her. But his letters, which reveal his truest self, are those of a cultivated, sensitive, but quite worldly man. His official speeches, naturally, are all in the " old-Roman " tone ; the old forms must reverently be preserved. So might an unbelieving Tory peer argue for the retention of bishops in the House of Lords. As for his philosophic writings, he felt himself to possess a genius for transmitting Greek thought to the Roman world ; and in them he puts the various systems forth with lucidity and sympathy, though he can make the characters of his dialogues criticise one another with extreme acrimony. As for himself, he settled down into Academic Doubt, that is, a true scepticism, and was able to acquiesce quietly and with dignity in his own assassination.

As a matter of fact, these philosophical discussions betokened a false dawn. They become important, religiously, much later on. The very fact that so much was being written by important persons towards the end of the Republic makes it more difficult for us to ascertain what the religion of ordinary people was. Official religion



everywhere was becoming more and more unreal, and just in proportion as "Italy" was more "unified," and towns became larger and more numerous, officialism increased so that only in the true countryside anything like the old "religion of Numa" survived. All efforts to *revive* it, as such, were as doomed as those which sought to revive the mediæval spirit by means of Gothic architecture. Aelius Stilo had been tutor to Varro and Cicero, and it was due to him that Varro made those immense compilations of ancient ritual and hoped to reproduce what once it stood for. Only by means of inscriptions on stone can we find some clue to popular belief, and these are nearly all mortuary.<sup>1</sup>

Tombs were built along the way-sides that the prayer of the passer-by might be frequent—this continued long after cremation had dissipated the vague idea that the "dead" went on living, somehow, under the earth. Bequests of gardens are found, that roses and violets might easily be obtained for offerings at tombs. A citizen of Sassina bequeathed a hundred tombs for such of his townsmen as might be too poor to buy one. The epitaphs are seldom cynical—"Once I was not : now I am not" : "Eat, drink, amuse yourself—and come !" But rather "Health ! Be the earth light to thee !" "Sacred to eternal sleep—Eternal Home !" commonly appear. Exquisite prayers are to be found : "Whatsoever each of you wish for me who am dead, may it be likewise yours, living or dead" : "If tears avail aught, show thyself in dreams to my eyes" : "I implore you, most holy spirits of the dead, consider my husband committed to your charge, and deign to be most generous to him, that in the hours of night I may behold him, and the swifter and more easily pass to where he is." And guilds were beginning to exist, members of which were not to fear the common

<sup>1</sup>I do not believe that the ordinary man went crawling about under pressure of fright due to doctrines of hell and torments there, as Lucretius keeps saying that he did. His insistence on this theme appears to me far too emotional to be due to a mere copy of something that Epicurus might long ago have said. I put it down entirely to the distortion of Lucretius's own mind, for I believe him to have been a psycho-pathic case, though this is not the place to argue that.

pit where slaves were thrown, but were assured of at least a separate niche, with its burning lamp and modest gifts of yearly flowers.

But by the year 27 B.C., when we may consider the Roman Empire to have definitely begun, it had become a common-place in writers that religion was dead. Poets tell how cobwebs hang about the altars, and ancient images are crumbling in deserted shrines. The temple of Jupiter Feretrius was roofless; that of Juno Sospita filthy and decayed. I do not think that anyone, who was not sure that humanity *must* have some religion, would have dreamed that anything of the old was left to pass even into newer forms.

Let us then conclude, at first, negatively. There is no reason of any sort to suggest that the Latins ever passed through a period when they had no religion. There is no reason for crediting them with a background of pure magic or pure animism. It is certain that when they became inhabitants of the peninsula they were already believing in a supreme god and in Jupiter, and that in proportion as they became clearer about the nature of a Supreme God, they found no name save Jupiter's by whom to call him. No one else was suitable.

Their world was, however, full of "close-at-hand" spirits, concerned with every imaginable detail of human life. It was, then, with these that they had immediately to cope. Yet we have not the right to assert that such spirits were bad rather than good—they had to be treated properly if you wished to be treated properly by them. Men must live "in peace" with gods and spirits if the "pax deorum" was to subsist as between gods and men. Hence, while the great substantial virtues developed themselves in home life and in field life, necessarily a thousand rites came into existence which to us, who believe all too little in spirits, appear otiose if not foolish, but appeared the simplest common sense to the Latin.

The purity, as I should call it, of this natural belief, worship, and morality was contaminated first by the influence of the semi-Hellenised Etruscans; then by an influx from the Graecised cities of the south; then, directly

from Greece and even Asia. The gods became "like men" in objectionable ways; and meanwhile the "law-making" tendency of the Roman evolved a "religious code" no less than it did a civil one, and gradually the official worship became stereotyped, and a mere mask for scepticism. Deeper influences, emotional, other-worldly, and philosophical were setting currents uneasily astir to this side and to that, when through the murky skies flashed the meteor Julius Cæsar, and a world was born anew.

## APPENDIX

A PRAYER TO MARS ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
LUSTRATION OF A FIELD

Father Mars, I pray and beg thee to be of good will and propitious to me; to me, to our house and household, for the sake of which I have ordered pig, sheep, and bull to be driven round my field, land, and farm, that thou shouldst prohibit, ward off, and avert diseases visible and invisible, barrenness and devastation, calamities and bad weather; and that thou wouldst allow crops and fruits, vines and bushes to grow great and do well, and that thou wouldst save and keep safe shepherds and flocks, and give good health and strength to me and my home and household; because of these reasons and because of the purification and purifying of my farm, land, and field, as I said, increase be thine by means of this sucking-pig, lamb, and calf!

The straightforward character of the prayer is charming; also, the determination to leave nothing out, but to define exactly what is wanted for what: the slight difference between the words *prohibessis defendas averrunces* seems to me this—Mars is asked to forbid the very happening of storms, etc.; or at any rate to keep them off the property should they occur and begin to approach; or at the very least to turn them back from the boundary should they get as far as that. How accurate too is the distinction between *viduertatem* and *vastitudinem*—the former word is negative; the soil is just sterile: the second implies that a definite disaster has happened to it—it is not only “waste” but “laid waste.” It is remarkable how the Canon of the Mass likes still to use this true Roman style—*haec dona, haec munera, haec sancta sacrificia: quam oblationem . . . benedictam, adscriptam, ratam, rationabilem, acceptabilemque facere digneris*. See *Words of the Missal*, chapter xiv.

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# RELIGION OF IMPERIAL ROME

By Rev. C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

AN account of the development and decay of Roman Religion up to the year 27 B.C. has already been given. In that year the "Roman Empire" may be regarded as inaugurated. The following pages cover the period between 27 B.C. to 312 A.D., when the Emperor Constantine formally adopted Christianity, which soon became the official religion of the Empire.

## I

### THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION

Julius Cæsar was murdered in 44 B.C., but the appalling civil wars that had harrassed the republic did not cease, nor was there any symptom of reform in the provinces, maladministered from the outset. In 31 B.C., Octavianus, grand-nephew and adopted son of Julius, found himself without ostensible rivals. The chill and calculating youth, at the age of 19, addressed himself to the desperate task of reconstructing the dismal ruins. Of his political methods we need say no more than that he was as scrupulous about maintaining a republican façade as he was clear that a new sort of unity must be created—an Empire. Traditional Roman sentiment must not be violated, nor formula be discarded: yet a true unity, if any, among the huge aggregate of nations must be made by the formation of quite new ties, though, of course, when possible, the consolidation of the old. But the firmest of all such ties is unity of *mind*; and of all spiritual forces religion is the strongest, including both worship and morality. Octavianus therefore deliberately planned a religious revival.

He adopted the name "Augustus": in old Latin "august" meant *consecrated*. He was to be, in person, the representative and indeed vehicle of the divine. Even his house gradually took on the appearance of a temple. He spent 100 million sesterces (£800,000) in decorating temples; in Rome, in a single year, he restored 82 shrines. He ordered the nobles to rebuild their family chapels: he revived ceremonies that had lapsed through indifference or had been interrupted by war; he lengthened the popular Saturnalia and restored the Lupercalia (*cf.* 14). To do honour to the new era he restored the ancient *Ludi Sæculares* (Century Games), but altered their character from gloomy to brilliant, substituting Apollo and Diana, deities of light and splendour, for those of the under-world; and popularised three cults, each with a family-significance—*Venus Genetrix*, mythical foundress of his house; *Mars Ultor* (the Avenger), reflecting the interest of heaven back upon murdered Julius; and his favourite Apollo of the Palatine.

Court-flattery had this advantage; the very greatest writers of the day, summoned to assist him, responded vigorously and not without sincerity. Horace was sincere when he sang: "O Roman, thou shalt continue to pay for the sins of thy forefathers, innocent though thou be, till thou shalt have rebuilt the temples, and the tottering shrines of the gods, and the images black with smoke. Only in so far as thou holdest thyself lower than the gods dost thou rule: this is the origin; this, the end. It is the neglect of the gods that has brought down a thousand sorrows on unhappy Italy." He also rather perfunctorily forced a number of old ideas connected with agricultural and familial prosperity into his verses, and wrote an Ode for the Secular Games, and no doubt was more at home in comfortable houses rather than farms, though he had one. Still, from time to time his inspiration was really noble, and his art certainly exquisite. Even the licentious Ovid versified the Calendar (*Fasti*), a religious list of feasts: astonished at himself, he looks back to previous themes and cries out: "Who could have thought I'd have found a way *thence hither*?" But the *Fasti* are still corrupt, and

will not wholly have satisfied Augustus, and anyhow Ovid ended in exile. But Vergil, "whitest of souls," as Horace wistfully called his friend—the "Maiden," as he was nicknamed by Naples for his purity—did more than anyone, perhaps, by his passionately yet gravely beautiful poetry on Italy and Rome, to arouse religious sentiment. In his poems the country really does become once more haunted with divine presences; but above all "Rome" reaches a sort of mystical elevation: Aeneas is seen throughout as the agent of divine Destiny—his personality hardly counts at all—he is, above all, the "priest," bringing gods and worship to the future city whose ancestor he was. No doubt Vergil worked all that religiously "touched" him, whether old or new, into his Epic; you could not make a "system" out of what he wrote. But one of even his earlier poems, the Fourth Eclogue, was long thought to be a prophecy of the Virgin-born Messiah, and indeed, its "atmosphere" is religious to the point of being almost Hebrew-wise so: St Ambrose deduced from Vergil that even pagans guessed the Holy Ghost: verses of his are engraved in the Catacombs beside Christ's monogram: Constantine "proved" from him Christ's divinity. The Middle Ages wrote hymns to him, and put him among ancient Prophets in religious masques, and developed a whole mythology about him. But Vergil was, and remains, unique, whether as incomparable musician of words, or as Italian in love with Italy, or as visionary perceiving a mystical Empire beyond the farthest imagination of Augustus. But literature on the whole artificialises what it touches. Worship of gods, and even ideas about the gods, can co-exist with a deep-seated disbelief in those very gods themselves.

But the first great new fact that was developing, and has been strangely operative ever since, was the religious importance of the Emperor, as we can now name Augustus. The religious confraternities that he revived (and heavily endowed) were grateful. They heaped "priesthoods" upon him, though not till 13 B.C. did he "allow" himself to be "elected" Pontifex Maximus, so that the supreme religious and political powers were placed in his two hands. He



dominated those confraternities ; supervised their numbers and personnel and behaviour. His power was felt through the Provinces : he suppressed pamphlets, whether political or religious, that he disliked : he caused over 2,000 copies of " spurious " prophecies to be burnt. But above all, he was steadily himself becoming " divine."

Modern readers may find it impossible to believe that any living man could sincerely be thought to be divine—let alone himself think that he was so. But it is not impossible. When there is no rigid theology as to the Nature of God, all sorts of gradations are psychologically imaginable. God is—acts in—acts through—almost anything. And when a man has attained to a unique position—especially if it be a beneficent one—it can seem all the more " obvious " that God is " in " him, and acts through him, and acknowledges him. Now the more influential Rome had become in Egypt and the East, the more she was in contact with minds that like to *fuse* and vitally unite ideas and things, rather than to demarcate them and isolate them, which, thanks to our Greek inheritance, is more our tendency till of late, when everything has become mixed.<sup>1</sup>

Enough to say that until quite recently the Chinese Emperor was " divine," and that the Mikado is so, technically, even now. African chieftains easily become so. Fr. Lattey, in his pamphlet on Ancient King-Worship in the original version of this series, quotes a Baganda (African) war-god, whose century-old bones are (I regret to say) in a Cambridge museum. Sir J. G. Frazer, of course, in his *Early History of Kingship* (part of his *Golden Bough*) collected many instances of this sort of process : but all his work is rather fluid and requires constant verification and check. The real point is the inadequate distinction between " divine men " and " gods." Alexander the Great (*d.* 323), the more his conquests brought him into touch

<sup>1</sup>On this eastern background, and the western use made of what came through it, we commend Miss L. Ross Taylor's monograph : *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*, which covers the whole ground in an adequate way. Published by the American Philological Association, Middletown, Conn., U.S.A., 1931.

with the East, was ever more impressed by the divinity which not only "hedges" a king, but resides within him. His successors shocked their Greek contemporaries just in proportion as they claimed to possess prerogatives (like oracle-ships) which had been supposed to belong to gods, or at least to "heroes." For the Greeks themselves had given hostages to the idea. Any amount of men had been made heroes of, receiving semi-divine homage; and it is quite possible that ancient gods survived as mere "heroes" or demi-gods under a conquering cult, just as it is certain that Euhemerus considered that all the gods had originally been really men—"divinised." Perhaps the essence of the thing is, that men liked the idea of a god *continuing himself* in the person of his successive representatives, just as every father of a family felt that he inherited and transmitted a sort of family-soul. This certainly was the case in Egypt, where royal brother married royal sister, that the hereditary strain derived from an ancestral god might be uncontaminated. But when an ancient *idea*, from which a contemporary emotion (*i.e.*, the feeling that there is "something in it") cannot yet be divorced, is *also* politically and financially useful, it is certain to "work." At the crudest, if you were descended from a god, and "divine," you had the right to at least a percentage of the offerings at that god's temples. Thus the Egyptian Arsinoë (who died about 270 B.C.) was deified by her husband-halfbrother in her lifetime, and became "identified" alike with the Greek goddess Aphrodite and the Egyptian Isis, so she claimed at least one-sixth of the revenue hitherto payable to "her" temples. Many more instances could be quoted of kings (Antiochus Epiphanes, for example, who robbed the Jewish temple), or even generals (*e.g.*, Antony in 39 B.C.), claiming temple-money on the grounds of their divinity, or even, as "dowry," they, being gods, having been "betroted" by the frantic adulation of the East to ancient goddesses. But much more respectably did a man *feel* himself divine when he perceived that *as a matter of fact*, and most unexpectedly, he was becoming the *one* ruler of a heterogeneous mass of people who were the better for his rule.

He felt he *must* be the divinely appointed, god-inhabited, representative and earthly living symbol and agent of "One God"; and if a few thoughtful or cynical people laughed at him, the majority of court-crawlers encouraged him. Such is the psychological background to what happened, historically, at Rome.

Augustus, a sickly and practical and rather lonely man, was not too ready to think of himself as a "god." However, there he was—the One Man who had brought order out of chaos—internationally. He allowed feasts in honour of anniversaries—February 4th, when he received the title of Father of the Fatherland; July 4th, when he consecrated a great Altar of Peace. His name was inserted in litanies; myths formed themselves about his birth and boyhood; soon, every event in the imperial career was having its feasts or its fasts—births of children; cures from sickness—Nero was always having sacrifices for his divine throat, because he liked singing (and he was a true artist . . .). But Augustus had an Italian "background" as warrant. The mythical kings of Italy—Picus, and so forth—were vaguely divinised; the humblest dead became the Dii Manes—Ghost-Gods; Julius, once he became hysterical and lost his head, did not mind his statue being placed among those of the gods or temples being dedicated to Jupiter Julius; and once he was assassinated nothing could prohibit popular worship. As for Octavianus, he moved slowly. "Worship" begins only in remoter provinces; the fanatic East built temples to him earliest. Finally, temples entered Italy, but Rome, never. Even so, Augustus wished the "goddess Rome" to be the prime object of worship, to which his name might be added; or else, seeing that "Virtues" had for some time been worshipped, he allowed the adjectival addition—"Augustæ." But to worship the Virtues of the Emperor is to go a long way towards worshipping himself. Soon enough the Emperor's statue, or that of his genius, was inserted between those of the City-Lares; and by degrees the Senate began to "decree heaven" to the dead Emperor. Only the semi-mad Emperors (the mental state of anyone regarded as *unique* must become "eccentric") went to fantastic lengths.

Caligula called himself Brother of Jupiter, thought he was all sorts of gods and dressed like them, became priest to himself and had his horse for colleague, and decapitated Greek statues of gods and put his own head upon them. Nero declared that his baby daughter and her mother (whom he was said to have killed with a kick) were goddesses. Domitian liked to be addressed as Our Lord God. Vespasian, on the other hand, a hard-headed Sabine, said, when he felt himself dying, "Bad luck! I'm becoming a god . . . ." Aghast as you may stand at this fantastic development, its consequences were incalculable.

Exactly in proportion as some form of Emperor-worship became obligatory in every department of life, anyone whose conscience made it impossible for him to pay it was in a precarious position. The book of Daniel, with its story of the men who refused to worship the king's image, had no doubt received a new significance when Antiochus IV, of Syria, declared himself "Epiphanes," *i.e.*, God made manifest, and set up his statue (fusing his personality with Jupiter's) in the Temple. The revolt of the Maccabees was not forgotten when Caligula wanted to do the same. Petitions and protests showered in. The pagans of Alexandria had in fact destroyed several synagogues there to please the Emperor, and put his statue in others. An embassy, including the learned Jew, Philo, pursued Caligula from room to room of a palace he was transforming into a royal residence. "Are you," said Caligula, "the god-haters who deny my divinity, which all the world acknowledges?" An anti-Jewish Alexandrian embassy, also present, said yes, that these Jews alone had refused to sacrifice for his safety. The Jews replied that they had often offered sacrifice for *that*. "*For me*," said Caligula; "*not to me*." "It was as good as a play." However, the Emperor was interested in the decoration of his house, asked them why they did not eat pork, and hurried on, remarking that those who did not worship him were luckless rather than guilty. But only his assassination saved the Jews; in fact, Herod Agrippa I (*cf.* Acts xii. 22) was not averse to "king-worship"; only he too died horribly just when his flatterers were acclaiming him as a "god." But

the Jews were really too numerous, ubiquitous, and rich to be interfered with. Christians were relatively few, poor, and socially unimportant, and on them the persecutions were concentrated.

Observe that throughout the provinces (the enormously major part of the Empire) literally every part of social, political, and even commercial life involved the worship of the Emperor, and had for focus the cult of the "Augusti and the City Rome": provincial councils met at its temple: the middle class—excluded by birth or lack of fortune from high offices, but none the less in process of being deliberately created or fostered—found its opening by way of confraternities and Committees of Six in honour of the Emperor: Commerce itself was organised in Guilds which had their periodic festivities involving homage to his name or statue: the whole Army swore in his name and fought under his spiritual presence or *auspices*. Therefore, if a Christian took the act of Emperor-worship seriously, and was true to his conscience, he had to refuse to offer it, and put up with boycott from practically every part of human intercourse. From St John's Apocalypse, which deals very largely with the situation thus created, you find the hint that some Christians did regard the offering of a pinch of incense to the imperial statue as a conventional social gesture and no more; but St John could not admit that: and indeed, the days were coming when to the act of worship had to be added a formula "cursing Christ." There was then no possibility of doubt left. A Christian had either to apostatise openly or be killed. The Roman authorities did not at all *want* the Christian to be "guilty." They went almost any lengths in toleration, provided the imperial structure could be kept together. But they could not permit a "nation within a nation," an "empire within an empire"; the Christian who refused to worship the Emperor was driving a wedge into the always precarious unity and splitting it; he had to be eliminated. But since incorporation into that unity could be expressed only in a "religious" way, the Christian was killed for a "religious" reason; he was not only executed, but martyred.

In this essay it is not my business to look further into

the history of Christianity as such. Enough to say that Constantine, a man of great mental confusion (no wonder) in all religious matters, was very far from abolishing the *religious halo* of the Emperor. It is certain that he would not have allowed himself to be called "a god," but he, his acts, and his family were "divine," and so was half the organisation of his court. When in 330 A.D. he removed to Byzantium, centralisation and monopoly had a far better chance than when he had lived close to the Roman Pope, and had built basilicas in honour of apostles. Emperors who succeeded him, or their pictures, were honoured with external forms practically identical with religious ones which surrounded icons; correspondingly, Christ was painted dressed in imperial robes. It is not too much to say that the whole of the Christian East has been governed by the idea that the Sovereign is so definitely the earthly image of God and His viceregent as to be spiritually, too, an autocrat by right. Islam, far from interfering with this idea, strengthened it; and Russia in our own day still experienced its influence.<sup>1</sup> A later chapter will doubtless show how astoundingly near to this theory Charlemagne himself could sail: as Emperor he invested his lay-officials with a religious aureole, while he used ecclesiastics as imperial functionaries: and it was actually to be argued that the Christian Emperor was above the Pope, as representing God, whereas the Pope represented only Christ. The long history of the "divine right of kings" continued, with various modifications, till the Secular State arose, which claimed to control, or at least to profit by, Religion itself. Thus Louis XIV; Joseph of Austria; Napoleon and Bismarck; Combes or Calles; modern Spain, Mexico or Russia.

In view of the enduring importance of the idea of Cæsarism, or State-Absolutism, we cannot be rebuked for having spent so long on the divinisation of the Roman

<sup>1</sup>In ancient times, the Roman Emperor might have admitted Christ's dictum, that God and Cæsar were respectively to receive what was due to each because, in his view, Cæsar *was* God, and so could claim everything. Extreme modern State-ism can also claim everything, but logically only by asserting that there is no God. Genuine State-autocracy logically involve atheism.

Emperors, men who were personally cynical, anxious, sometimes mad, always in proximate danger of assassination, but who stood for the one mystical bond between all parts of that extraordinary Empire.<sup>1</sup>

## II

The second great new influence affecting the religious life of the Romans came from abroad : it consisted in an invasion of exotic cults, but, still more important than the rituals, of new ideas. Human nature is a " whole," and includes the emotions ; and even the felt need of an after-life that shall more than put right the imperfections of this one. Before the apparition of Augustus, official Roman religion had become, we saw, quite soulless. There could be no question of going back to the naive days of *numina* : a sophisticated world can hardly return on its own tracks. Augustus had evoked a superb vision of Rome Eternal, Goddess Rome, and had focussed a great deal of worship in himself. But however " social " man's consciousness becomes it never can cease to be an individual conscience ; and maybe the very " imperialising " of the Roman outlook occasioned a revulsion to what was spiritually individualist. Moreover, myriads of slaves were drafted from abroad into Italy, and they brought their worships with them : finally, masses of Romans or Italians were sent hither and thither with the armies, and grew accustomed to the cults they encountered where they served. And in proportion as a civilisation becomes elaborate, refined, and pleasure-loving, women will become more prominent than they used to be.

Hence a first element in the divine invasion was to carry the Roman well into the world of the individual conscience ; of a sense of sin and need of purification ; this in its turn fostered the notion of an after-life where such purification

<sup>1</sup>We refer to a later pagan phase—the identification of the Emperor with the Sun—below. Enough to add here that very little Christian ceremony or formula can be assigned a pagan emperor-cult origin. The word " Epiphany " in connection with Our Lord, could hardly but have been used in view of Christian doctrine as to His Person—" God made manifest." Still, the term " Saviour " applied to Him must not at all be linked with the same word as applied to rulers, eastern or western : its origin is purely religious and Hebrew.

should be accomplished if unfinished here, with the consequences of other-worldly punishments for the incurably bad, and of mystic union with the gods when the soul had lost all taint of earthliness. But all this practically implied "specialists" who should instruct men how to obtain this purification, and a special "caste" of priests was needed, who should preach their several cults, explain an ascetical system, and act as mediator between God and man. Much that might be noble, more (maybe) certain to be sordid, could be foreseen from this : but certainly all of it was very un-Roman ; and in the episodes of the arrival of the Great Mother, and of the stern suppression of the Bacchanals (*cf.* 14) we observed alike the need of the Roman for something more than he was getting, and the traditional instinct that *that* was not the sort of thing to get. These new cults come from Egypt and from the nearer and further East. The antiquity and strangeness of Egypt had always provided younger races with a kind of thrill ; but the origins and earlier forms of its religions have been treated of in another essay. Enough to say, here, that imperial Rome was fascinated chiefly by the cult of Isis, and of Osiris in connection with her. (Less is known about the god Serapis, who easily became fused with other gods ; and only so, I think, was either picturesque or mysterious). Those who demanded violent and cruder emotions obtained them in the November commemoration of the murder of Osiris, the search for him by his sorrowing sister-wife Isis, his joyous finding, and his exaltation to be judge of the dead in Amenti (Hades), and the thought of the ultimate union with him of all purified souls who were thenceforward called by his own name, Osiris. This particular religious "drama" was ridiculed even by pagans, who also recognised that Osiris was in origin a grain-god, like the other young eastern gods whose annual death and restoration to life was celebrated. The frenzied lamentations and then glee of the populace were objectionable to more refined, sober-minded, or cynical onlookers. Still, the spring festival must have been charming, when the holy boat of Isis, decorated and solemnly blessed, went out to sea to inaugurate the year's navigation. A regular carnival of



masked worshippers attended the white-robed procession of "initiates," women and tonsured men, carrying flowers and torches round statues and symbols of Isis and Osiris. A priest walked last with Nile water in a sacred vessel, which he raised to bless the people. Flutes and rattles (sistra) accompanied long litanies to Isis. Twice daily special services were performed in her temples: at the early morning sacrifice her image was unveiled: at two in the afternoon the blessing of Nile water was given and hymns were chanted by the devout.

It may have been in her other guise, mother of the divine child Horus, that she found her largest clientèle. Women, married or not, flocked to her shrines and slept there, to obtain dreams or other signs from the goddess. Despite the duty of observing chastity, these shrines became places of assignation, and the pagan Juvenal furiously calls the goddess a "procuress." Yet another side of the cult irresistibly attracted both philosopher and ascetic.

The Isiac philosophy—or rather, that which could best be illustrated by her "myth," as by Plutarch—was practically Neo-platonist (see below, p. 27), and rested on a pessimist dualism, contempt of "matter," and aspiration to absorption in the divine. It contained nothing special, nor need we dwell on it. But the process of initiation is described for us in detail by Appuleius (*Metamorphoses*), and introduces another non-Roman idea—the total setting aside of ordinary social life for one of religious abstinence.

Lucius offers himself for initiation to the head of an Isiac temple in gratitude for a miracle worked by her in his favour. The priest checks his eagerness to take the vows. He fasts, prays, waits in the temple precincts. A vision reveals the day: he is plunged in a holy font, and passes ten more days in solitude, silence, and prayer. On the last night a mystical drama, presumably representing the history of Isis, Osiris, and the soul (see on the Eleusinian Mysteries, 16) excites him to the highest pitch of religious ecstasy. Words fail him to describe, afterwards, the mystic death and revival he had experienced. Next day, clothed in "religious" dress—which, now that he has entered on this "holy warfare," he

will wear till death and even in his tomb—he is revealed to the populace above the brilliant altar, at the foot of the statue of Isis, her devotee, in chastity and obedience, for life. The prayers and meditations of Lucius are so sublime and intense, so tender and so personal, that even if Appuleius took them from some other document, adapting them into his own inimitable rhythms, I cannot believe that he did not feel them at least while he wrote them, and if he did, the compelling power of the Isiac cult is the more evident. For after this explosion of mysticism the book ends dully; and the miracle in question was a grotesque one (Lucius had been changed into an ass by magic, and was changed back by eating Isiac rose-leaves in a procession), much in the book is gloatingly obscene, though elsewhere it has a true touch of the macabre, and also (as in the episode of Psyche) is exquisitely artistic. None the less, the rigid Tertullian could hold up the chastity of real initiates and priests of Isis as a model to Christians, though for the bulk of its worshippers the cult ran riot into licentious superstition or grew ossified into ceremonies of a magical sort. “Very soon the flames sank on the altars which from the Sahara to the Atlantic, in barbarian German forests, in Holland, in York, had kept men and women of all ranks and characters on their knees before the goddess Isis, maiden, mother, sorrowful, powerful, merciful, and tender.”

Cults from Asia Minor and Syria seem to have had all the sordid and none of the nobler elements of the Isiac one. The Cappadocian Mâ, assimilated to the Italian war-goddess Bellona, was worshipped by crowds of fanatics dressed in black. Twisting like dervishes, they shrieked through the streets with drums and trumpets, hacking shoulders and arms with knives, drinking their own blood and sprinkling the people with it. They prophesied the future and the hysterical mob showered money and food on them. The “Syrian Goddess” was the same as the Old Testament Astarté, and was the origin of the “Greek” Aphrodite. She was especially worshipped at Byblus; her great devotee among the Emperors was Nero. She had for lover the divine Adonis, whose violent death, revival, and

"sending up into the air " were noisily celebrated each spring. At Byblus her priest stood for seven days, sleepless, on a column thirty cubits high. Thousands of pilgrims had their names taken by another priest who, for an offering, sent up information to the former, and he prayed for each. As they journeyed, these pilgrims slept only on the ground, drank only water, and shaved their heads and eyebrows. A noted Phrygian god, Sabazius, is interesting because undoubtedly his worshippers helped themselves to details of Jewish belief and worship, and recognised the ancient name *Sabaoth* in their own god's name ; maybe too they obtained their figure of a hand with three fingers raised in blessing, from a Jewish source ; they put these up as votive offerings ; thence too, perhaps, their belief in a good angel who should guide them after death to the eternal repast of bliss which their ritual banquets prefigured. Thus too the name Jehovah (Yahweh), in forms like *Iao*, and the Hebrew names of Angels, entered magical Greek or Egyptian formulas alongside of those of pagan gods ; and the title Hypsistos, " Most High," under which the Jews, especially in their innumerable Asiatic colonies, seem to have adored God, attached itself to Attis (see below) and to others. The whole subject of borrowings by paganism from (a) Judaism and (b) Christianity has been too little studied. We are only now emerging from the period when it was assumed that any borrowing must have been the other way round. However, St John shows in his Apocalypse how the Wild Beast, antagonist of the Lamb, is a " caricature " of Christ ; the Emperors, we saw, actually equipped themselves with the costumes of various gods : and people's temper was precisely to see any favourite god of theirs in any other important deity, and anyway were apt to invoke as many as possible so as to be on the right side somehow.

If Caligula had officially recognised the Isis-cult, it was difficult for his successor Claudius to do less for that of Cybele, the " Great Mother," also from Phrygia. Her worship, along with that of Attis, has already been spoken of (*cf.* 14) ; enough to say, now, that the worship developed in its full form and lasted officially from March 15th to

27th. The first days formed a kind of preparation : on the 23rd his symbol, the pine-tree, was carried to his temple : the 24th was the "Day of Blood" : devotees mourned around the dead god's effigy : blood-libations were poured : the neophytes underwent their ghastly mutilation. During the night they were supposed to become identified with Attis and to be mystically united with Cybele. The next day was the "Exaltation," when the god arose from his death ; the 26th was, frankly, a "day off," and was called Rest-Day, Requietio : on the 27th a splendid procession through the city closed the festival.

The rite called *Taurololium* came to be closely connected with this cult, whatever was its origin. The goddess declared that some individual, community, or town had sinned and needed purification : or men, conscious of sin, might offer themselves to be purified. A platform pierced like a sieve was built ; the suppliant stood beneath it ; bulls were led on to the top, and their blood, through the severed arteries, streamed through the holes over the devotee, who rubbed it into every part of his body and even swallowed it and came forth scarlet, "horrible to see," says the Christian poet Prudentius, but, according to the formula, "reborn for eternity," *renatus in æternum*. The sacrifice was very expensive ; in the *Kriobolium*, a ram was substituted for the bull. The earliest European example of this rite is found at Naples in 133, but it spread all over the Empire. When Christians became better known, pagans accused them of having copied their baptismal formulas and doctrine from their practice ; the history of both is, however, quite clear, and Hebrew in origin ; it is far more probable that the pagans derived their formula *renatus* from the Christians.

But the rite turns our mind to the last oriental cult that we need study here, that of the Persian Mithra.<sup>1</sup> As to the development of Mithraism within the Empire, written

<sup>1</sup>In the earlier edition of this series an entire chapter was dedicated to him. Now he has taken a truer place in the general perspective. M. Cumont had then recently published his epoch-making books, and it was the fashion to derive as much of Christianity from Mithraism as possible : Renan had already said that had Christianity failed, Mithraism might have been the world-religion.

evidence concerning it is very poor ; on the other hand, inscriptions and sculptured monuments are rich and numerous. The name *Mitra*, a light-god connected with the sky, appears even in the *Veda*, and belongs to days "when the ancestors of the Persians were still united with those of the Hindus" (*cf.* 5). In Persian religion (*cf.* 11), the *Avesta* present him as god of heavenly light ; he is not sun nor moon nor stars, but they are his innumerable eyes and ears. Watchful, omniscient, he becomes God of Truth and Oaths. He travels the sky, but gives prosperity too on earth, is the champion of the supreme god *Mazda*, and engaged in a fight with Darkness conceived, first, physically, then spiritually and morally. But though the *Avesta* reduce *Mithra's* importance, exhibiting as they do the religion as reformed by *Zarathustra*, the older beliefs seem to have gone on evolving in court circles, and it is in this shape that the Persian element in the *Mithra-cult* reached the Roman Empire. Under the *Achæmenid* kings (about 650–330) *Mithra* is an active god, fighting for *Ahura-Mazda*, supreme and serene, against evil spirits. In popular and royal religion he was equally important. But at least by 350 B.C. the cult had spread far into *Babylon*, where the magi gave it an astrological colour, and indeed into *Asia Minor*. After the death of *Alexander of Macedon*, all his successor-kings piqued themselves on preserving all that was possible of the ancient Persian cult, but they decked it out with beautiful Greek art, and also linked it up with far less reputable cults such as those we have mentioned. Had *Mithridates*, king of *Pontus* (120–63 B.C.) realised his dream of an Asiatic Empire, *Mithraism* could have corresponded in one or other of its parts with all the complex elements he would have unified. But *Pompey* defeated him ; and the broken-up armies propagated the cult they had grown fond of throughout the Roman Empire. So weak was it, in one sense, that it was modified by almost every cult that it met, but hardly altered them ; yet so attractive that wherever the armies went from east to west, wherever the millions of oriental slaves were carried, and by means of the ubiquitous eastern merchant, it made

new adepts, and by 70-100 A.D., Mithraic "congregations" were being formed in Europe, and all along the Danube and the Rhine, from Alps to the Black Sea, and in the military posts in Britain (especially along the Wall from Tyne to Solway), Mithraic relics were found. What did this cult contain?

Had it a doctrine? Probably it contained "suggestions" or ideas proper to *all* the districts and religions through which the original cult had passed. An enigmatic statue often stood at the side of Mithraic shrines: a lion-headed human figure, twined obliquely with a serpent having the signs of the Zodiac engraved upon it; with four wings at shoulders and hips; holding a sceptre and two keys, and with a bowl of water at his feet—what could that be? Probably the Persian idea of Infinite Time (Zervan), all-producing, all-governing, all-destroying. But the imagery is Babylonian; and I doubt whether the worshippers, seeing it peering through partially-closed niches, and maybe spouting fire through tubes carved up it to its lips, were more than vaguely awestruck by it.

Mithra was an "intermediary," the light between earth and sky; and it is extremely rash to say that this "half-way" position was moralised and expressed mediatorship between God and man. Rather, Mithra tended to become the Sun itself, giver of light and life, Truth and Good. On each side of his central image stood a statue, a youth with torch turned upwards (dawn), the other, with torch turned down (sunset). But this central image, carved on a slab, was framed by mysterious sculptures that we risk interpreting. One is clear—Mithra is rising, as a child, from a conical stone. The light is "being born" from over the mountains.<sup>1</sup> Other subsidiary pictures surround the central image of Mithra killing a bull. Thus the bull is seen peaceably grazing; then Mithra flings himself on it and drags it away into a cave. Kneeling on its back

<sup>1</sup>A sculpture of two shepherds or herdsmen is sometimes near this image (sometimes in quite a different position; often absent). Since Christian imagery derived next to nothing from Mithraism, possibly Christian art here influenced the sculptor; but I doubt this. Mithra's career was to be connected with a bull; so pastoral situations were to be expected from the outset.

he stabs it ; wheat and the vine are seen *germinating* from its tail (once, wheat-ears spring from the wound) ; scorpion and serpent try to poison its vitality. Finally, Mithra is carried up in a Sun-driven chariot and seen seated at a banquet. Other side-pictures show the bull floating on a flood in an ark ; Mithra shooting an arrow at a rock, whence water issues, and so forth. Mithra's cult titles having been : Comrade, Helper, the Just and Holy, the Youthful and Inviolable, ever-wakeful, on his guard, Unconquered, Unconquerable, and Saviour ; God very Present ; Giver of Harbour ; Anchor for the soul, I incline to think that the slab must be interpreted in terms of an incomplete fusion of his solar and his human rôles (of which the earlier field of operation was agricultural and pastoral) : Mithra rises, sunlike, upon the earth : by conquering the earth, which resists him (and mankind) ("in the sweat of thy brow"), he makes it produce all good things despite a poisonous counter-attack : the god and humanity join in a common meal ; the god is exalted, and man (certainly according to Persian notions which survived, heavily overlaid with alien material, to the end) was finally to get rid of all darkness and enter into "light."

The ritual was kept secret ; its literature (Greek, with Persian words interspersed, like the Greek words in our Latin one) has almost wholly perished. Still, we know that during the process of initiation, neophytes passed through seven grades : he was (or might be, if he progressed satisfactorily) "consecrated" as Crow, Veiled (the word is, I think, *Kruphios*, not *Gruphos*, Gryphon), Soldier, Lion, Persian, Sun-Racer, and Father. The Crow seems to have been a "messenger" from heaven ; in many initiations the neophyte was veiled and then unveiled—the *Ostensio* or Showing of the neophyte is often mentioned : the Soldier was offered a wreath of flowers, but rejected them, saying : "Mithra is my crown," and thereafter wore no garlands or crowns for ever ; swore not to reveal the "mysteries," and (possibly after a painful test, like branding) to fight for the god against evil. These lower grades could be conferred on children, who were called "accepted" : the "conferring" was called *Traditio*, which, like *Acceptio*,

was a Christian word ; those admitted to the higher ones were " Participants." At some moment a ritual bath was given, promising ablution from all sins ; honey was placed on the hands and tongue of the Lion and the Persian, symbolising, I think, a further preservative : it was used in mummifying by the Egyptians ; but the Christian rite of milk and honey given to neophytes has no connection with this. The Fathers were governed by a *Pater Patrum*, were " Co-Sacranei " and directed the worship, and " Brothers " among themselves. It can be argued that the *Pater Patrum* held his office for life and lived at Rome ; there is even a Mithraic chapel on the Vatican. Probably only Participants were admitted to the sacred meal of bread and water—in Persia, *haōma* juice was used ; that wine was substituted for it in the West (where *haōma* does not grow) is pure conjecture. Tertullian was impressed by the sincerity of this ritual, for part of which he uses the vague word *sacramentum*, but most probably in his favourite sense of (military) oath.

Mithraic worship took place in narrow " crypts," of which the third and lowest level of San Clemente in Rome is one. At the entrance a bowl for ritual water stood. Down either side ran low masonry platforms leaving a gangway between. On these the worshippers placed themselves. Behind rails, at the far end, the sacrifices were offered, with lamps burning, and to the sound of flutes or bells. Over the altar invariably stood the slab showing Mithra killing the bull : sometimes it swung round on a pivot showing Mithra and the Sun standing over the dead bull, or some other device. Services seem to have been daily in honour of the Planet of the day, with special observance of the Sun's Day (Sunday). Later, December 25th emerged into significance as the Sun's Birthday (see below, p. 26). The groups of Mithraists were small, but very highly organised and carefully financed : within them, class distinctions vanished, but women were not admitted.

We have spent so long over Mithraism because it formed a rallying-point for dying paganism, and because of its points of apparent contact with Christianity.



It differed, however, at the roots from that Faith, because involved in the "syncretism" of its period. That is, all the gods were beginning to be regarded as equivalents—as expressions proper to epochs or nations of one transcendent God with whom man could, and must, enter into some communion in this life if he were to be happy in the next. All these "expressions" were justifiable and "true" if they helped men to get rid of sin, live well, and win access to God. Hence the "Father of Fathers" himself could be priest of *several* religions; Mithraism gave a colour to other cults on the Danube, while on the Rhine local deities enter Mithraic crypts. In Phrygia, the Persian Anâhita was worshipped; so the national pair, Cybele and Attis, caused Mithra and Anâhita also to be worshipped as a pair, and to be regarded as equivalents of Cybele and Attis. But while this connection brought Mithraism, up to a point, under State-protection, and provided an outlet for female devotion, it also compromised Mithraism badly, so licentious was the Cybele-Attis cult. Finally Mithraism melted into the universal Sun-worship (see below, p. 26) save for its innermost groups of initiates (who were, indeed, its greatest strength); and, with the gradual departure of the Roman armies from the provinces, and the triumph of Christianity, it expired. The Magi walled up their crypts, burnt their sacred things, and withdrew to desolate mountains or the East.

Further, Mithra, like all these eastern gods, was not a historical person, and nobody thought he was: on the other hand, their cult was bound up with nature-worship, and there was no form of this with which they could not associate themselves. The very adaptability of Mithraism forced it to "drag behind it all the weight of a chimerical or hateful past," whereas Christianity stood on its own merits from the outset, emancipated alike from the ghastly immoralities and the absurd scientific speculations hitherto prevalent (Cumont). Mithraic worship was, moreover, "magical," and the seven grades of initiation correspond much more to degrees in Freemasonry (or even to minor and major orders), than to anything like our seven "sacraments" (which were, indeed, not defined to

be "seven" till quite late). The austere ethic of Mithraism has often been praised; apart from the general oriental theory of the badness of matter and the advisability of freeing yourself from it, I doubt if it contained anything special save, quite possibly, among the very small groups of initiates. We must never picture the "complete" Mithraist as one among masses of men, as all baptised Christians are on an identical footing amongst themselves. The armies were the great *colporteurs* of Mithraism, and armies are not noticeably austere. Finally, Christianity and Mithraism rose and took shape in different parts of the world; spread through the Empire by different routes; took their complete form before they came into substantial contact; and, as we have said, differed interiorly in what they held about God, and about man, the world, and its Saviour. M. Cumont will not allow that Mithraism affected Christianity in any way save—possibly—a few art-formulas.<sup>1</sup>

### III. RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is not "religion," nor did the Romans think out a philosophy for themselves. But they needed a "philosophy" as the Empire developed its splendour, lusts and cruelties, religious chaos, and was at the mercy of an ever more autocratic Emperor. The blind cult of Pleasure, or the stern doctrine of Renunciation alone would serve: among those who followed Pleasure, you did not seek for thinkers: those who needed a philosophy, being Romans, needed a practical "school of life," as has been said, not an abstract system only; and they found this to their satisfaction in Stoicism. It could teach them how to live decently and die bravely, and, should they need it, how to find consolation elsewhere than in this world.

Seneca was the tutor of Nero's boyhood, a recluse during

<sup>1</sup>In *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Mr. Kipling has a Hymn to Mithra which, charming as it is, is as alien both historically and in sentiment to anything, Roman or oriental, let alone specifically Mithraic, as can be.

the latter years of his reign, an obedient suicide in 65 A.D., and the writer of letters so spiritual as to lead to the false tradition that he became a Christian. True, despite his doctrine of detachment, he lived in extreme comfort and even opulence; the mad Caligula, who had flashes of insight and a sharp tongue, called his writings "sand without lime." But there is an under-current of real conviction in them which wins our sympathy and even admiration. We outlined in essay 14 Stoicism as it existed during the later Republic. The World was a whole, kept going by a Force that could be called the World-Soul. Man, and his "soul," were part of this whole, though not fully harmonious with it. If one achieves that harmony by practising "apatheia," one is at peace and arrives without fail at one's predestined end. Once the complete harmony is fulfilled the World-process halts, is "burnt up," and begins again. This doctrine, essentially atheist and fatalist, was undoubtedly preached and believed by Seneca, so far as he was not sceptic (for we find elements of chill cynicism and doubt, now and again, in his work); it, and it alone, suited the perfectly wise and wholly independent man, whom "God" transcended by reason of antiquity alone, not in his wisdom. Still, the moment you called the Immanent World-Force "God," you opened the door to metaphor; once metaphor entered, it brought with it picturesque, emotional consequences, which ministered to the weaker part of human nature—his own included. God becomes a Father, Creator, a Friend never distant, the tenant of our souls and our Inspirer. Wherefore we must worship Him and love Him and struggle to be like Him, and, in this fight, "the gods are on our side: they are not proud: to those fain to ascend, the gods reach out their hand." Nay, God gives the very impulse to ascend: if we think they do not care for us "we must be blind to all the hands uplifted to them from every corner of the earth, and dead to the world's great chorus of supplication." In this warfare, all men should fight side by side: "man to his fellow-man is sacred," and that, without exception: "slaves are our humbler friends."

And so "the day of death, that thou fearest as thy last, is really that of thine eternal birthday."

Seneca, however, who was more of a society-confessor than a missionary, had a scale of perfection, so to call it, for his clients and also for himself when he needed consolation, and could agree that these pathetic expressions were no more than that: God did not *really* hear, nor love. Still, I think that he felt—without being able to explain it—that there was more than that: those moods, those expressions, were *necessary* complements to the true Stoic ones: and, if necessary, they should *somehow* be true. Hence his unmistakable glow of conviction, though there is no limit to the extent to which a man may dupe himself.

However, there were philosophical missionaries too. Apollonius of Tyana (*d.*, very old, about 100 A.D.) studied philosophy in Greece and, they said, Indian theosophy under Brahmin direction. Returning to Europe, he restored religious ceremonies, lectured on philosophy, preached from temple steps and in theatres, denounced vices, reformed profligates, united quarrellers, and wrote religious treatises. Much later, a "life" of him was written, much distorted, and equipped with miracles, some of them based on the gospels.

Musonius (a contemporary) did not write, but preached, setting "men's consciences bare before their eyes," and rather tactlessly discoursed on the beauty of Peace to the armies of Vespasian and Vitellius engaged in civil war at the gates of Rome. Maximus of Tyre was more "broad-minded," and wrote tracts of rather academic theology, genuine philanthropy, and fervent aspiration. Dion Chrysostom, however (*d.* 117), journeyed in beggar's dress, plied with questions on morality by accompanying crowds. His harangues were full of highly personal attacks on the vices of the notable citizens where he found himself. All these men were genuinely appalled by the misery of the human race and by the inability of man both to *know* and to *will*. "Men are like children," Dion wrote, "bereft of father and mother; often in their dreams they reach out their hands to them, but they are not there." Yet, stripped of its local colour and of

emotion, this missionary preaching amounts to nothing save the truths of "natural theology" and insistence on morality. Differences centre round greater or less emphasis on ascetical abstinence.

But these sincere men suffered from their imitators. Charlatan philosophers were constantly banished from Rome—not without reason. Their austerities masked libertinism, or at least won them vast fortunes. The life of "Cynics" (whose ideal was "back to Nature" and its simplicity) lent itself to trickery on the one hand and bitter caricature on the other. Yet Demônax attained to universal respect; children loved him; men rose as he passed; the stone he sat on was kept garlanded long after his death. St Augustine will not have the Cynics of his day to be calumniated. St John Chrysostom praises them. Maximus, a fourth century Cynic, used their dress till he was actually consecrated bishop. Indeed, comparisons were easily drawn between the Cynics and "the impious folk in Palestine." In a word, there were two currents, one setting towards religious emotion and ecstasy, the other, towards a lofty moral philosophy. But the former ran riot into licentiousness; the latter degenerated into an appalling intellectual superstition.

Thus the rhetorician Aristides (*b.* 117 in Mysia), broken in health by his exciting career, spent 13 years seeking a cure from shrines—his chest-bones were thrust outward; his back bent like a bow; his limbs shook; he had a gigantic tumour. The shrine-priests told him to bathe, though in high fever, in an icy stream, and then run a mile against a north wind . . . . Purged and blood-let as never were our ancestors, yet, believing a soothsayer that he would be suddenly and wholly cured—he was so. Another type, Artemidorus of Daldis (*d.* about 200), compiled five books about dreams; the most grotesque of psycho-analytic records come nowhere near these dull, trivial, sublime, obscene, fantastic volumes. Alexander of Abonoteichos (2nd c.), of disreputable origin, yet set up an oracle-shrine that threw the very Empire into confusion. He obtained a huge snake, extracted the fangs, added a human

mask with jaws that worked by threads and, being a clever ventriloquist, made it answer questions. He had an army of informants: high officials, great families were involved in his blackmailing toils. An old senator was mad enough to marry Alexander's daughter—by the Moon. He initiated a persecution of the "atheist" Epicureans, and of the no less hostile Christians. He and his oracle came to a wretched end.

But even so, both in the poorest strata of society, and at Court, remarkable instances of piety and philanthropy are found, especially under the Antonines. The letters of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius (they ruled 138-180) are utterly different from Cicero's. The more intimate they are, the more devout. The constant references to prayer—"Every morning," says M. Aurelius, "I pray for Faustina" (his wife)—and to Providence: indeed, religious philosophy reached its brightest in Epictetus, an ex-slave, and Marcus Aurelius, his spiritual descendent. "What can I do," asked Epictetus, "I, a lame old man, save sing God's praise and call on all men to join me in my song?" If the old Greeks had loved Athens passionately, "canst not *thou* say," Aurelius asks himself, "Dear City of God?" For to him the world was one great harmony and the House of God. But, as we said of Seneca, such noble exclamations are but few in their "Stoic" self-revelation: theirs was a "stunned acquiescence" in life rather than an enthusiastic acceptance of a loved and living Master and His Cross, such as you see in A Kempis. Yet "social conscience" was waking up. Both private and public "charities" were becoming an institution characteristic of this age.

#### IV

From 194-235 the Severi held power, and under them religion underwent its last oriental modification. Many thousands of Syrian slaves, annually drafted into the various parts of the empire, and commerce, had familiarised the Roman world with Syrian cults. But the imperial family-connections now set up with the princesses Julia, Domna, Mæsa, Soæmis, and Mamæa, all Syrians and ladies

of enormous social and political influence, went still further to Syrianise popular worship. Of Atargatis, the "Syrian Goddess" *par excellence*, we have already spoken. Now came the various Baals ("lords") each with his local name, but all described as Jupiter by the Romans. Antoninus Pius had restored the temple of Baal-Bek into a world-wonder. So many recruits came from Commagene that the Baal of a little town there (not even once mentioned by a writer), Jupiter Dolichenus, is shown by inscriptions to have been a most popular importation. However, the monstrously vicious Elagabalus, from infancy priest of the Baal of Emesa, tried to impose on the Empire, as paramount, his patron the Unconquered Sun Elagabalus, with his ritual debaucheries and even human sacrifice. A violent reaction set in: everything began to break down: what survived was the worship of the Sun. The infinite God was aptly symbolised in two ways—the Sun in the sky, and the Emperor on earth. Even in Plato the Sun had been symbolically associated with the sublimest idea of the Absolute: in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, where vast plains provoked attention to astrology, the Sun had held chief place. In the pure Hebrew Faith, the sun in heaven had been placed parallel with God's Law (see the magnificent Psalm xviii.). Now, when the priest of any one religion could be priest of any other; when Alexander Severus could place the statues of Christ and Abraham between those of Orpheus and the Lares in his private oratory, the barriers had fallen—all things became but symbols of the One Thing. Under Aurelian (290–295), the cult of the Unconquered Sun triumphed. A gigantic temple with college of priests and four-yearly games attached was instituted. Macrobius and others developed the philosophical foundation of the enormous synthesis. The winter solstice, December 25th, was fixed in the West as the birth-feast of the Sun of Righteousness. Heretics no less than pagans traced connections between the material sun and Christ: even in St Leo's time, Christians could be found who, on entering the basilica of SS Peter and Paul turned to salute the rising sun. The whole of the reaction under Julian the Apostate centred round this cult. And

even the Neoplatonist philosophy, which, with amazing lapses into puerility and obscenity, was elaborating the doctrine of the One God, infinitely removed from intellect as from sense, and to be met by ecstasy alone, offered Him to the multitude under the form suited to their lower spirituality, as the Sun.

It is not for us to sum up, here, the value or effects of this long history of worship. Enough to say that St Augustine affirmed that Paganism had at least *seen*, from its hill-top, the true path. "Believe me," wrote the Christian poet Prudentius, "even then the road was being prepared for Christ upon His way." *Christus cogitabatur*, said Tertullian. We who hold that the world is made for God, and receives grace for the fulfilling of its vocation through Christ, are glad to perceive how human nature has never failed to show a *desire* for what He was, in fact, to reveal and achieve. God, powerful, wise, just, loving : God, from whom sin alone sundered man and with whom purification leading to purity united him : God, coming down to human life and not inexperienced in birth and hardship and death, and triumph over death : Virginity, Motherhood, Sacraments, Sacrifice—all this was desired by man, who realised, no less, his helplessness to obtain what he needed. Hence the recurrent crop of novelties in religious experiment : hence the under-current of despair in the noblest pagan writers : hence that astonishing swerve downwards, often commented upon, just when a pagan system seemed about to achieve sublime success. Hence too a recognition, possible to ourselves, of how Christianity *suits* that human nature which it was to elevate and transform.



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# GNOSTICISM, MARCIONISM, AND MANICHÆISM

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## INTRODUCTION

WHEN the new religion of Christianity set out to conquer the Græco-Roman world, the latter was full of religious ferment. The popular mind was still led captive by idolatry, with its superstitions and its legends : the religion of philosophy, in its various forms, Stoicism, Platonism, Pythagoreanism, was giving to the cults and myths a symbolical interpretation which was calculated to render them more acceptable to cultivated minds : the Greek and Oriental mysteries of Demeter, Isis, the Great Mother, and, very soon, of Mithra, were attracting the minds of many by reason of their secret initiations and their promise of divine protection.

These seductive cults, which for a time captivated religious minds and, so to speak, intoxicated them, doubtless left behind them a feeling of satiety and disgust which prompted their disciples to seek elsewhere for a spiritual food which would be less heady, and more healthy. Many pagans were in this way led to Christianity and, after their conversion, told of their long search in the darkness and, finally, of their deliverance, when suddenly, in the midst of the night, they saw the shining of the Divine Light. In this connection it is sufficient to recall the account which St Justin gives us in his Dialogue, of his vain search among the various philosophies, or again, Tatian's account of his life in paganism, or St Cyprian's description of his first impressions as a neophyte, in his letter to Donatus.

But if on the one hand these superstitions and religious excesses could, through disgust, direct certain minds towards Christianity, they could on the other hand leave behind them some dangerous memories : darkness has its charms, and the souls it has seduced may tend, when bad days come, to tire of the quiet joys of the light, and to recollect with wistful regret the boisterous intoxication of the past. We mentioned Tatian just now, and this brilliant but proud man, so boastful of his triumph over the superstition of the Greeks, allowed himself to be ensnared by the allurements of Gnosticism, for he died as a leader of a sect.

#### NATURE OF GNOSTICISM : PRE-CHRISTIAN GNOSTICISM

Gnosis means knowledge, and in point of fact those who, in the early days of Christianity, boasted of their "gnosis," laid claim to a more profound religious knowledge than that possessed by ordinary folk. They believed themselves to be the possessors of a divine revelation having its origin in some ancient message, transmitted secretly through a chain of initiated persons. By means of this mysterious secret tradition, the Gnostics fancied that they could link themselves up with the primitive peoples—the ancient Egyptians, for instance—and, through them, with the Gods themselves. Thus, the Hermetic books claim to be revelations made to Hermes or received from him.<sup>1</sup> The Christian Gnostics similarly put their own revelations under the patronage of some apostle, or often of Mary Magdalene, who was supposed to have received them from the risen Christ, before his Ascension.<sup>2</sup>

But Gnosticism was not only a revelation, it was also a doctrine of salvation : it taught the soul how to liberate

<sup>1</sup>These books, which for the most part date from the third century A.D., have been edited and studied by Walter Scott, *Hermetica*, 3 vols., Oxford, 1924, 1925, 1926.

<sup>2</sup>See, for instance, *Pistis Sophia*, a Gnostic work of the end of the third century. English translations by Mead (London, 1921), and by G. Horner, with an introduction by F. Legge (London, 1924).

itself from the material world in which it had been imprisoned, and to ascend once more to the spiritual world from which it had fallen.<sup>1</sup> This liberation is brought about by the communication of a divine revelation, accompanied often by magical formularies and rites. The participation in this gnosis was not granted or even offered to all men : as in the case of the mysteries, gnosis was reserved for the initiates, and this constituted one of its most powerful attractions.

The religious doctrine thus transmitted is characterised by a very marked dualism : matter is to be despised and hated, and the Sovereign Deity is to be removed as far as possible from any contact with it. Accordingly, the creation of the material world is ascribed either to an inferior god or demiurge, or else to angels or archontes. Between the visible world and this deity were placed intermediate beings more or less numerous, and it is by them that the Divine action is propagated as far as the material world, through a process of constant deterioration. Again, it is through these intermediate beings that the soul can gradually elevate itself until it reaches the Supreme God.

These ideas can be adapted to many different religions and mythologies. Gnosticism, indeed, was a religious movement anterior to Christianity, and one which was opposed to it in its most profound tendencies. During the early centuries of our era, it invaded the whole Græco-Roman world, contaminated Hellenic religion, and threatened Judaism, before beginning its attack upon Christianity. Its origin must be sought in the religious syncretism which from the time of the conquest by Alexander, and still more after the Roman conquest, had mingled and fused together all the cults of the East.

This Pagan Gnosticism, which was anterior to Christianity, appeared especially at Alexandria and Samaria.

<sup>1</sup>This is the theme of the Hymn of the Soul which we find in the *Acts of Thomas*. These Acts date from the third century, but the hymn itself is certainly earlier, and seems to be of pagan inspiration. It has been edited and translated by A. A. Bevan, *The Hymn of the Soul* (Texts and Studies, V., 3, Cambridge, 1897), cf. V. Burch, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, xix. (1918), pp. 145-161.

It was the Alexandrian Gnosis which inspired Plutarch's treatise on Isis and Osiris; we see this in his affirmation of two sovereign and opposite principles, the one the source of good, and the other of evil; in this material world of ours the divine germs are, as it were, sparks smothered in matter until they reappear and shine forth once more in new productions; they are the members of Osiris, dispersed and buried in all the land of Egypt, and sought for by Isis.<sup>1</sup> These reveries will reappear shortly afterwards in the Christian Gnosis of Basilides and of Valentine.

### SIMON MAGUS

At Samaria, Gnosticism appears in the early days of Christianity already flourishing and active in the person of Simon Magus. When the deacon Philip arrived at Samaria, just after the death of St Stephen, he found the city led astray by Simon: "He practised magic, and thereby imposed on the people of Samaria, pretending to be some great person: all, from the smallest to the greatest, hearkened unto him, and said "This is the Power of God who is called Great" (Acts viii. 9-10).

Simon, however, had himself baptised by Philip; then, when Peter and John arrived, he tried to purchase for money the power of conferring the Holy Ghost. Peter severely rebuked him; Simon seemed humbled and penitent. The New Testament says nothing more about him. But later works enable us to follow the development of the sect: St Justin, who was of Naplous and who knew his fellow countrymen, tells us that "almost all the Samaritans, and a few men of other nations, recognised Simon and worshipped him as the Sovereign God."<sup>2</sup>

Samaritan Gnosticism thus progressively exalted its

<sup>1</sup>*Isis and Osiris*, ch. 45 and 59, cf. 49. The chief texts have been translated or cited in my *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, I., pp. 81-84 and II. 96.

<sup>2</sup>*Apol.* I., 26. 3; cf. 56, 1-2. Justin was mistaken as to the supposed statue of Simon at Rome, but we can make use of his testimony concerning the religion of the Samaritans, and the worship they paid to Simon.

hero: first it regarded him only as an intermediate divinity, the "Great Power of God"; then it worshipped him as the Supreme God. At the end of the second century, Irenæus shows us the Simonian Gnosticism endeavouring to adapt itself to the dogma of the Trinity: "Simon claimed to have come down amongst the Jews as the Son, in Samaria as the Father, and in the other nations as the Holy Ghost" (*Adv. Haer.* I, xxiii. 1).

Side by side with this Supreme God, the Simonian Gnostics enthroned a goddess consort, Helena.<sup>1</sup> This cult would seem to have arisen at Tyr, where the Moon God (Sena or Helena) was associated with the worship of the Sun; the Simonians identified this goddess with Wisdom, while the Alexandrians regarded her as Isis.

The Clementine romance and the Acts of Peter describe the struggle between St Peter and Simon the Magician, first in Syria and then at Rome.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this romance we can discern traces of the obstinate opposition which Gnosticism maintained against Christianity, following up the latter from Syria right to Rome itself.<sup>3</sup>

Simonian Gnosticism was entirely pagan in its origin as well as in its development. At one moment it seemed to have become converted to Christianity in the person of Simon; then it once more separated from it, and adopted an attitude of uncompromising hostility. Other forms of Gnosticism were to arise, in the very bosom of Christianity itself, and were to endeavour to twist in the sense of their own fancies the inflexible firmness of the Christian faith and morals. The first attempts were hesitating and timid, but from the beginning the Apostles realised the danger involved, and opposed them with all their strength.

In his earliest epistles St Paul had to defend himself

<sup>1</sup>Justin, I. 26, 3; Irenæus, I. 23, 8.

<sup>2</sup>On this struggle, narrated in the Acts of Peter, see Vouaux, *Les Actes de Pierre*, 1902, p. 100-109; and for the Clementine romance see C. Schmidt, *Studien zu den pseudo-Clementinen* (1929), p. 47-66.

<sup>3</sup>On the Simonian Gnosticism, see L. Cerfaux, in *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, xv. (1925), pp. 489-511; xvi. (1926), pp. 5-20; 265-285; 481-503.

above all against attacks from without ; the opponents he has in mind are generally either Jews or Judaizers. But very soon heretics rose up in the bosom of the Church ; the earliest letters scarcely mention them, but, beginning with the Captivity, the anti-Gnostic controversy occupies a larger place in the theology of the Apostle.<sup>1</sup>

If we endeavour to trace by means of the Apostolic writings an outline of the Gnosticism which then menaced Christianity, we shall observe the following characteristics :

(a) Matter is opposed essentially to spirit, as an evil principle to the good principle ; hence contempt for the flesh, which goes so far as to deny the resurrection (I. Cor. xv. 12), or else to understand it in a figurative sense only, as signifying baptism (II. Tim. i. 18). In morals, divergent consequences are derived from the same principle : sometimes we find a form of libertinism ; everything is allowed, because all that is carnal is unworthy of consideration (I. Cor. vi. and x. ; Apoc. ii. 14 ; II. Pet. ii. 10 ; Jude 8) ; at other times on the contrary we find a rigid asceticism, forbidding contacts which are deemed impure, or particular foods, and even marriage (Col. ii. 16, 21 ; I. Tim. iv. 3).

(b) Bold and daring speculations were very popular, such as visions, theories about angels,<sup>2</sup> genealogies (Tit. iii. 9), "cleverly devised fables" (II. Pet. i. 16).

(c) They went so far as to put Christ below the angels (Col. and Hebrews), and even to deny Him (I. John ii. 22 ; II. Pet. ii. 1 ; Jude 4). Without going so far as this radical negation, many denied the reality of the Incarnation : Jesus Christ had not really come in the flesh. This Docetism was combated by St John in his Gospel and in his first Epistle ;<sup>3</sup> and also soon afterwards by St Ignatius.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Lightfoot, *Philippians*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>These errors are especially combated in Col. ii. See A. L. Williams, *The Cult of the Angels at Colossæ*, in *Journal of Theol. Studies*, xi. (1909), 413-438.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, I., pp. 482-485.

<sup>4</sup>Especially in the letters to the Trallians and the Smyrnians, cf. *ibid.* ii. 81 *et seq.*

(d) These heretics were for the most part Jews, calling themselves doctors of the Law (Tit. i. 10; I. Tim. i. 7; Apoc. ii. 9). In the Second Epistle of St Peter (i. 20, iii. 16), we see that they likewise endeavour to shield themselves behind the authority of St Paul. Sometimes this Gnosticism has even been regarded as a radical and exaggerated form of Paulinism.<sup>1</sup> This is an insufficient explanation: Gnosticism arose out of the speculations which were at that time current throughout Judaism and Hellenism; it attacked Christianity as it attacked every living religion; it was eliminated from it, but only after long struggles. These struggles, however, themselves were by no means sterile, for they gave more strength to Church authority, and more precision to Christian dogma.

## GNOSTICISM IN THE SECOND CENTURY

The combats which we have just described were merely the preliminaries for the great crisis which arose in the middle of the second century. To the last survivors of the Apostolic age it seemed as if it was quite a new fight, and for them a very painful one. "My God," cried St Polycarp, "for what a time hast Thou reserved me"!<sup>2</sup> Doubtless they were well aware that the Apostolic age had already known its heretics, like Cerinthus, Cerdon, Saturnilus, and the rest; but then these people worked in the darkness, hidden "in their dens,"<sup>3</sup> whereas now that the Apostles have disappeared, the heretics work in the open, and organise their sects.

Hegesippus attributes this boldness on the part of the heretics to the disappearance of the Apostles, and he is

<sup>1</sup>Thus MacGiffert, *History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age* (1897), p. 502 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by St Irenæus in his *Letter to Florinus*, apud Eusebius, *H.E.*, V. 20, 4-8.

<sup>3</sup>Hegesippus, quoted by Eusebius, *H.E.*, III. 32, 7: "Up till then (the end of the Apostolic age) the Church was like a pure virgin, without spot; those who tried to alter the sound rule of salutary preaching worked in darkness, and as it were in dens . . . ."



right in so doing ; but other causes also contributed to give to the Gnostic crisis a virulence which it had not hitherto known within the Christian Church. One cause was the very development of the Church itself, and the increasing penetration of the Gospel into the most cultured circles of the Greek and Roman world. By invading this new world the Church secured for itself new apologists, but also new opponents, such as Celsus, and later on Porphyry ; it also encountered dangerous disciples, who seized upon her doctrine only to deform it. This danger was all the greater because these heresiarchs found disciples all around them in restless and ambitious men whom the truth had for a moment charmed, but who had also known the seduction of Gnosticism and only too easily succumbed to it.

These new perils arising out of the rapid growth of the Church and of its penetration into the world of philosophy and letters led, about the middle of the second century, to a serious and painful crisis ; and through all the churches, so closely united with each other, there ran, so to speak, a shudder : the danger, felt everywhere, provoked everywhere a similar reaction : episcopal authority asserted itself, links of Catholicity were tightened, the Church of Rome took in hand the defence of all the churches and directed them in an efficacious manner ; and all Christians, grouped around their leaders, rallied thus round the Apostles, the witnesses and delegates of Christ, and the founders of the churches. But this authority, so docilely obeyed, did not extinguish the Spirit, for in face of the sects which crumbled away and broke up, the great Church appeared more than ever as the Body of Christ, the Mother of Christians : " For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God ; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every grace, and the Spirit is Truth. Hence those who do not belong to her, do not imbibe from her maternal breast the food of life, do not drink from the well springing out of the Body of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Irenæus, *Adv. Haer.* III., 24, 1 (P.G. vii. 966).

## BASILIDES

Of the great Gnostics, the first we know of is Basilides. He taught under the reign of Hadrian,<sup>1</sup> at Alexandria,<sup>2</sup> and seems to have written several long works,<sup>3</sup> of which only some fragments have come down to us.<sup>4</sup> The problem which haunts him, and all the Gnostics who come after him, is that of the origin of evil :<sup>5</sup> " Whence comes evil, and how does it arise " ?<sup>6</sup> This is indeed a fundamental and difficult problem. Plato had endeavoured to solve it ; Basilides attacks it in his turn, and similarly by a very free metaphysical speculation. In a long fragment conserved by Clement, Basilides reflects on the sufferings of the martyrs. In the eyes of the pagans, these sufferings were often a stumbling block ;<sup>7</sup> Basilides also has felt this difficulty. He endeavours to defend the Providence of God, and affirms that no one suffers unless he has deserved to do so. If it is objected that many of the martyrs were innocent, he replies that if they themselves had not sinned at least they had a tendency to sin. If the subject is pressed, he takes refuge in metempsychosis : the martyr was expiating the faults of a previous life, and this was a favour which God had accorded him. If one then raises the difficulty of the sufferings of Christ, he replies with an imperturbable audacity : " If I am pressed, I will say that a man, whoever he may be of whom you speak, is always a man,

<sup>1</sup>Clement, *Stromata*, vii. 17, 106.

<sup>2</sup>Irenæus, I., 24, 1.

<sup>3</sup>A long fragment, quoted by Clement (*Strom.* iv. 12, 81-83) is taken from Book 23 of the *Exegetica* of Basilides.

<sup>4</sup>These fragments are found for the most part in Clement ; but an important fragment is found in the *Acta Archelai*, 67.

<sup>5</sup>Epiphanius, 24, 6 : " This evil sect had its source in the investigation and explanation of the origin of evil."

<sup>6</sup>Tertullian, *De præscriptione*, 7.

<sup>7</sup>Thus at Lyons, in 177, after the death of the martyrs, the pagans said : " Where is their God, and what have they gained by their religion, which they have preferred to their very lives " ? (Eusebius, *H.É.* V. 1, 60).

while God is just. For, as it has been said, no one is free from stain."<sup>1</sup>

This speculation, which stops at nothing, already gives us an idea of what Gnosticism will become. In face of the Cross of Christ, Basilides still persists : his philosophy is dearer and more sacred to him than his religion : if Jesus suffered, it must be because he had sinned.

This explanation of suffering as the result of sin, and personal sin at that, places humanity as a whole under a heavy condemnation. At the same time, in this sinful mass of humanity Basilides discerns a few chosen ones, and here again he points the way to all the Gnostics who are to follow him : one of the great attractions in their system is this claim to form a separate caste in the human race ; they alone arrive at the truth, and this not by teaching but by natural intuition. For Basilides, this natural intuition is faith, but for the disciples of Valentinus, faith is the lot of the simple, while gnosis is the privilege of the perfect. But all agree in this, that the higher gifts arise from a difference of nature ; faith, as Clement objects to Basilides, is no longer " the reasonable disposition of a free soul."<sup>2</sup>

These problems in moral theology arrested more than any others the attention of Clement ; but Basilides did not confine himself to them ; adopting the Pagan gnosticism, he transported into Christian theology the system of emanations, and made it the subject of a secret teaching reserved for the initiated.<sup>3</sup>

Valentine will arrange all these abstract divinities in pairs ; Basilides sets them forth as individual progressions. At the head there is one unique principle whom he calls

<sup>1</sup>This text is quoted by Clement, *Strom.* iv. 12, 81-83. E. de Faye has summarised it and commented on it in his book, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme*, pp. 41-44. He sees in it " a great advance upon the ecclesiastical Christians of his time." This is one of the numerous indications which show that this historian of Gnosticism has a decided bias in favour of his heroes.

<sup>2</sup>*Strom.* V. 1, 3, 2. Cf. ii. 3, 10 ; IV. 13, 89.

<sup>3</sup>The Ogdoad of Basilides is explicitly mentioned by Clement, *Strom.* IV. 25, 162, 1. Cf. de Faye, p. 54.

the Ungenerated Father. Then comes the Intelligence (Nous) ; the Word (Logos), Thought (Phronesis), Wisdom (Sophia), Power (Dynamis), Justice (Dikaiosyne), Peace (Eirene).<sup>1</sup>

All these emanations imagined by Gnosticism are so many intermediaries between the Sovereign God and matter, serving to connect these two terms which are infinitely distant from each other. The Supreme God does not contaminate himself by contact with matter, and nevertheless, this world, low and corrupt as it is, is not entirely separated from the divinity. We notice here again how Gnosticism has been haunted by the difficult problem of the origin of evil. In one of the myths in the *Timæus*, Plato had explained the mixture of good and evil here below by the action of secondary deities. It was this explanation that governed Hellenic thought for a long period, and it dominated Gnosticism.

But in the Gnostics, and Basilides in particular, the Platonist influence was modified by a dualistic line of thought, the same, in fact, as had already influenced Plutarch in his treatise on Isis and Osiris : the antagonism between good and evil, light and darkness, is at the beginning of all things, and this struggle, which goes on all around us and within us, is eternal and fatalistic. This idea, which Persian mythology had set forth in such an uncompromising form, plays a great part throughout all Gnosticism, not only in the complicated and comprehensive speculations of Basilides, Valentine, and their disciples, but also in the weak and rigid theology of Marcion and, beginning with the third century, in Manichæism and all the sects which spring from it.

It is in an anti-Manichæan treatise that we find a long fragment of Basilides, already manifesting this dualism.<sup>2</sup> Under the discreet veil of a myth, what Basilides presents as the solution of the problem of evil is really the old Persian dualism, the fatalistic antagonism which exists

<sup>1</sup>Clement, *loc. cit.*, cf. Irenæus, I. 24, 3 ; *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, p. 95 and notes.

<sup>2</sup>This text is cited in the *Acta Archelai*, 67. It will be found in my *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, II, p. 97, n. 2.

eternally between Light and Darkness. Again, it manifests the pessimism which characterises all these theories: there is some good here below, but how little!—it is but a reflection of the Light, which is perceived for a moment in a mirror and then is lost for ever. The Simonians similarly said: Of wisdom man can only grasp a partial image, itself is ever beyond their reach.<sup>1</sup>

Urged on by this dualism, Basilides goes so far as to make the devil a god, as Clement objects to him.<sup>2</sup> In face of the Supreme God, he sets up Archontes, the head of the evil angels, and the god of the Jews;<sup>3</sup> on the day of the baptism of Jesus this Archontes is represented as being struck with terror at the sound of the heavenly voice, and the unexpected appearance of the dove, and this fear was for him "the beginning of wisdom."<sup>4</sup> Already we see an anticipation of Marcionism in all these features, the opposition between the Supreme God and the god of the Jews, and this unexpected manifestation of the Messiah, which alarmed Archontes, whose domain was thus suddenly invaded by the Supreme God.

Of this Gnosticism of Basilides we have only a fragmentary knowledge, but we know enough about it to discern its religious character. At first sight it seems to possess many Christian features, which are apt to give one a wrong impression. Thus, we find in the Ogdoad a Word, a Wisdom, a Power; elsewhere we read of a Christ, and there are references to his baptism, his death, his martyrs, his faith. But all these Christian reminiscences are merely the remains of a religion which Gnosticism has destroyed and effaced. The Supreme God is relegated into an inaccessible distance; the chain of intermediaries, which exists between God and the world, is but the baseless fabric of a dream, and can neither guide our faith nor uphold our effort, nor transmit our prayers. This miserable world of matter is illuminated

<sup>1</sup>*Recognitions*, II, 12.

<sup>2</sup>*Strom.* IV, 12, 85, 1.

<sup>3</sup>*Irenæus*, I, 24, 4.

<sup>4</sup>*Clement, Strom.* II, 8, 36, 1; *cf.* 28, 2 *Excerpta Theod.*, 16.

only for a moment by a passing reflection of the Light perceived for a moment in a mirror. In this Darkness, only the Gnostics can discern the way which is to be taken. This knowledge is natural to them, just as the blindness of the rest is unavoidable. Pride may indeed be fostered by such a privilege, but religion finds nothing therein to raise it up to God or to incline it towards mankind.

### VALENTINE

All these speculations of Basilides were taken up and developed by a man who was the most influential theologian of the Gnostics of the second century, Valentine. "He came to Rome under Hyginus, flourished there under Pius, and remained there until Anicetus."<sup>1</sup> He thus spent about thirty years there, from 136 to 165. This fact shows us how decisive already was the influence of the Roman Church : it is this Church that the sects seek above all to conquer, or at least to penetrate, assured that from thence their movement would be propagated throughout all the churches. And indeed, during the second half of the second century and the first years of the third the Valentinian sect was the most numerous and the most powerful of all the heretical bodies.<sup>2</sup>

It owed this diffusion without doubt to the brilliant talent of its master, but also to his insidious cunning. Basilides already had distinguished among his disciples the profane and the initiated ; he reserved for the latter the mysteries of gnosis. The Valentinians accentuated this distinction : the common teaching was covered with the appearances of orthodox Christianity : one can read

<sup>1</sup>Irenæus, III, 4, 3. Tertullian tells us (*Adv. Valent.*, 4) that "Valentine had hoped for the episcopate, for he had great talents, and eloquence ; but another, recommended by his martyrdom, was preferred to him ; Valentine, in his anger, broke with the orthodox Church."

<sup>2</sup>This fact is attested by Tertullian, *Adv. Valent.*, 1, and by Origen, in *Ezech. hom.* II, 5.

all through the letter of Ptolemy to Flora without noticing anything in it of esoteric gnosis.<sup>1</sup> The opponents of the Valentinians, Irenæus and Tertullian,<sup>2</sup> denounce this deceitful stratagem: "When the Valentinians," says Irenæus, "come across people who belong to the Great Church, they attract these by speaking as we speak; they complain that we treat them as excommunicated people, although on both sides, according to them, the teaching is the same; and then they shake their faith little by little by means of questions; those who do not resist they turn into disciples, and take them aside in order to expound to them the unspeakable mystery of their Pleroma." Tertullian adds, "If you ask them quite simply to expound these mysteries to you, they answer with contracted brow: 'It is very deep.' If you press them further, they set forth the common faith in equivocal formulas. They do not entrust their mysteries even to their disciples until they have won them over completely; they have the secret of persuading before they instruct." To this we may add that Gnostic propaganda did not take place among pagans; it aimed at corrupting the Catholics; Gnosticism is not a free and independent tree, but a parasite. Accordingly, one cannot be surprised at the severity of its opponents, nor at the difficulties of the historians when they endeavour to reconstitute a doctrine which was always in a state of flux, which took many and various forms, according to the whim of the sects, and which is known to us only by a few fragments of the Gnostic works, or by the attacks of the Catholic controversialists.

In Valentine as in Basilides, the esoteric teaching has as its chief subject the Pleroma, that is to say, the divine world constituted by the Eons. In a fairly long

<sup>1</sup>This letter has been transcribed completely by St Epiphanius, *Haer.* 33, 3-7. Harnack has edited it with great care in the *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie zu Berlin* (1902). The esoteric teaching is not set forth in it, it appears only in the far distance: it may be revealed later on to Flora, if she shows herself worthy of it. What Ptolemy expounds in his letter is an interpretation of the Pentateuch.

<sup>2</sup>Irenæus, III, 15, 2. Tertullian, *Adv. Valent.*, 1.

Valentinian fragment cited by St Epiphanius,<sup>1</sup> the exposition of these mysteries begins as follows: "I am come to tell you about unnameable and unspeakable, and supracelestial mysteries, which cannot be comprehended either by the Powers, or the Dominations, or the subordinate Forces, or by any [creature whose essence is] mixture, but which are revealed solely to the Thought of the Immutable." This mysterious theogony is related to that of Basilides; but it is distinguished from it mainly by two characteristics: the divine life is propagated within the Pleroma not now by individual emissions, but in pairs; moreover, in addition to the group of the eight first Eons, we now have a second group formed of ten Eons, and then a third, formed of twelve. Thus the Pleroma is constituted no longer only by the Ogdoad, but also by the Decad and the Dodecad, and thus we have the sacred number of thirty Eons, which was already current in the pagan Gnosticism of Alexandria, as described for us by Plutarch.<sup>2</sup>

In this far-off haze, to the secret of which Valentine pretends to attain, the Pleroma is not always seen after the same fashion: At the origin of things, other texts present no longer the couple Abyss-Silence (Bythos-Sige), but the Father, Ingenerate and Solitary, who one day willed to engender and form the primitive Duad, Intelligence and Truth (Nous and Aletheia).<sup>3</sup> However, the different Valentinian texts which have come down to us have the common feature of describing the propagation of life within the divine Pleroma as taking place under the impulse of concupiscence. It is under this impulse that the Eons unite with each other and fecundate each other, and thus give birth to new Eons which, like the first, are androgynous, and like them also are inflamed with desires.

<sup>1</sup>Epiphanius, *Haer.* 31, 5-6. Harnack (*Geschichte d. Litter.*, I, p. 178) sees in this text an authentic fragment of Valentine. Holl, in his note on Epiphanius (p. 390) regards it as "one of the most ancient sources of Valentinianism." Cf. *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, II, p. 105 and 110.

<sup>2</sup>*Isis and Osiris*, 47.

<sup>3</sup>For instance, in Hippolytus, *Philos.*, VI, 29, 5-30, 9.



We find similar ideas in the Manichæan Gnosticism, but there at least we are dealing no longer with divine Eons, but with demons, or impure archontes, who allow themselves to be seduced by the Virgin of Light.<sup>1</sup> Thus this Gnosticism, which is so ambitious, bears the mark of its origins, and mingles its unclean imaginations with its metaphysical dreams.<sup>2</sup>

With this theogony is combined a legend concerning original sin: the last Eon, Sophia, fell, and has to be rescued from her sad condition. Sometimes it is said that her fall has removed her outside the Pleroma; at other times that she remains in the Pleroma, but has disturbed It by her foolish ambition: endeavouring to imitate the fecundity of the Father, she has produced a miserable abortion, which has fallen outside the Pleroma. In order to restore this, Intelligence and Truth send forth two supernumerary Eons, Christ and the Holy Spirit. We see here a desire to return towards the Christian tradition, but this feature is a distinct excrescence. Jesus appears in His turn; as in many other Gnostic systems, He is distinct from Christ; He is the common fruit of the thirty Eons of the Pleroma; He unites Himself to Sophia, who is still suffering the results of her fall, and He purifies her from her passions.<sup>3</sup>

These speculations are presented to the Gnostics with the guarantee of a divine revelation; this revelation may be imparted immediately to certain individuals, but more generally it is connected with Christ by a secret

<sup>1</sup>Cf. F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le Manichéisme*, I. (Brussels, 1908, p. 54 sq.).

<sup>2</sup>W. Bousset, in the article Valentinus in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edition, p. 853, sees in the very great part ascribed by the Valentinians to concupiscence a relic of the religion of the Great Mother: "This Meter is in the system of these Gnostics, also at one time the stern, austere goddess, the Mother, who dwells in heaven, at other times the licentious goddess of love, the great courtesan, who, *e.g.*, in the Simonian system, takes the form of the prostitute Helena, in whose worship all kinds of obscene rites were celebrated."

<sup>3</sup>All this is set forth in the Valentinian text quoted by Hippolytus, *Philos.* vi. 30, 6-31, 6. Cf. my *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, II, p. 108 sq.

tradition, supposed to be guaranteed by a real or fictitious disciple of the Apostles of the Lord. Thus, Basilides, according to Clement (*Strom.* vii. 17), claims the authority of Glaucias, whom he describes as a disciple of St Peter ; according to Hippolytus (*Philos.* vii. 20, 1), Basilides and his son Isidore claimed that Matthias had communicated to them certain secret discourses which he had himself received from the Saviour in a confidential instruction. At other times the supposed authors of this revelation are not named, and the writers content themselves with invoking a secret tradition coming from the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

In these pretensions we recognise one of the characteristic features of Gnosticism : it is a revelation offered not to all mankind, but reserved as a privilege for certain elect souls. The human race is divided into three groups : the pneumatics, the psychics, and the hylics : the last named are condemned to the slavery of matter ; the second can laboriously escape from damnation by asceticism ; the first-mentioned constitute the elect race ; they possess a divine germ implanted in them unbeknown even to the demiurge or his angels ; they are saved by the gnosis, which comes from an illumination by God.<sup>2</sup>

This conception of an elect race dominates everything in Gnosticism ; to proud minds it was one of its chief attractions ; but to the disciples of the Gospels it appeared as one of its most manifestly anti-Christian features.

The school of Valentine became speedily broken up into rival sects, each claiming the liberty to dogmatise on its

<sup>1</sup>Thus Ptolemy, in his letter to Flora : " When she shall be judged worthy of the apostolic tradition which we ourselves have also received by succession." In *Pistis Sophia*, the author claims to transcribe the revelations given by Jesus to the Apostles and to Mary Magdalene during the twelve years which the Lord is supposed to have passed on earth after His Resurrection. Other books present themselves as a Gospel of Mary Magdalene, or as a Revelation of John. Cf. *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, II, p. 119 sqq.

<sup>2</sup>This conception is set forth with great emphasis by a disciple of Valentine, Heracleon. He wrote a commentary on the Gospel of St John, numerous fragments of which have been conserved for us by Origen. These have been collected and studied by A. E. Brooke, *The Fragments of Heracleon*, Texts and Studies, I, 4, Cambridge, 1891. Cf. *Histoire du Dogme de la Trinité*, I, p. 113 sqq.

own account : " The Valentinians," remarks Tertullian (*De Praescriptione*, 42, 8), have taken the same liberties as Valentine himself ; the Marcionites the same liberties as Marcion ; they have, in their turn, transformed the faith : the Valentinian heresy thus split up into two branches ; in the West a school, called by Hippolytus (*Philos.* vi. 35-6) the Italic school, spread abroad not only in Italy but also in the south of Gaul. It was to this school that Ptolemy and Heracleon belonged, and it is to this that Irenæus usually refers. The Eastern school, to which belonged Axionikos and Bardaisan, flourished especially in Egypt and Syria ; we find there also certain magicians, such as the Gnostic Marcus attacked by Irenæus (i. 13 *sqq.*). The performances of this charlatan do not merit a detailed study, but they must not be altogether lost sight of ; they show to what miserable practices this proud Gnosticism could allow itself to be led.

### MARCION

Marcion belongs to the same generation as Basilides and Valentine, but he was older than either of them. He was the most formidable opponent that the Church met with in the second century. His strength did not lie in his character as a metaphysician or as a prophet ; he was nothing like Valentine or Montanus, but he was a man of action and a leader ; he was able to create numerous churches, strongly constituted and closely united with each other ; he drew after him his " companions in misery,"<sup>1</sup> of whom many confessed the Christian faith even to martyrdom. His Bible was a mutilated one ; his theology was weak and inconsistent, and nevertheless this new sect, started with tremendous energy, set out to conquer the world, and engaged in a fierce war against the Church.

Marcion was born at Sinope. In this Pontine province Christians were numerous, as Pliny bears witness in his

<sup>1</sup>This was how Marcion described his disciples : Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.*, IV, 9 and 36.

letter to Trajan, and the Churches were strongly organised. According to Hippolytus, Marcion's father was a bishop, who excommunicated his son. The young man, who was a shipowner and rich, left Pontus and went to Asia Minor. There he was opposed by St Polycarp, who regarded him as "the first-born of Satan," and when, in 154, the old bishop of Smyrna went to Rome, he profited by his stay in the Eternal City to reconcile to the Church many disciples of Valentine and Marcion. For Marcion had himself come to Rome. He presented himself there as a faithful Christian, and had formally claimed to be such in a written document which the Roman Church preserved<sup>1</sup> and, "in the first ardour of this faith," he gave to the Church 200,000 sesterces.<sup>2</sup> He lived for a time in the background, preparing and developing his doctrine, and devoting himself to strengthening its foundations by preparing his *Antitheses* and his version of Scripture.

When this work of elaboration was concluded, Marcion presented himself before the presbyters, and asked them for the interpretation of some sentences in the Gospel which seemed to him to be particularly significant: "A good tree can only bear good fruit" (Luke vi. 43); "No man putteth new wine into old bottles" (*ib.* v. 36). The interpretation which they gave him did not satisfy him; he fell away, and the Roman Church rejected the money as well as the giver. This rupture took place in July, 144: and this was for the Marcionites the beginning of a new era.

The spread of the new sect was very rapid: about 150, Justin already wrote: "Marcion of Pontus, who teaches still to-day, professes a belief in a god superior to the Creator; with the help of demons he sows his blasphemies throughout the world" (*Apol.* i. 26); and a little further on (58), "many accept his doctrine and mock at us; they cannot prove any of the things they set forth, but, stupid like sheep carried away by a wolf, they are the prey of atheism and of demons." At the beginning

<sup>1</sup>Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 2. Cf. *De præscript.*, 30; *Adv. Marc.* 1, 20.

<sup>2</sup>Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.*, iv. 4; *De Præscr.*, 30.

of the following century, Tertullian will write : " The teaching of Marcion has filled the whole world."<sup>1</sup>

This very rapid success will be better understood if we bear in mind the sense of uneasiness felt at that time by some imprudent or badly-instructed Christians in respect to the narratives of the Old Testament, and particularly in regard to its legislation. The author of the Epistle of Barnabas wished to see in these laws merely symbols of spiritual realities : God never meant to ask the Jews for a temple built of stone, or for carnal circumcision, or the repose of the Sabbath. Very soon we find this same solution adopted in the letter of Ptolemy to Flora. But at the same time it was clear to the mind of all who were not biassed that this violent interpretation ran counter to the whole Bible.

Marcion rejected this idea : there are no symbols, everything is to be understood literally, but this literal meaning he considers unworthy of the Supreme God. The God of the Jews, *i.e.*, the Creator, is not the God of the Christians, or the Father of Christ. Here we have the fundamental dogma of Marcionism, and it is round this doctrine that the whole conflict will centre.

In order to bring out more clearly the opposition which he thought he could find between the two Testaments, Marcion wrote the book of *Antitheses*. This work, the only one he wrote, was for his disciples as a sovereign rule of faith. It consists for the most part of texts from the Old Testament and the New, opposed to each other, in order to display the opposition of the two Testaments, and, in consequence, of the two Gods. The Catholic doctors were accustomed to draw up collections of Biblical texts or " witnesses," which they gave to their disciples in order to help them to understand, to defend, and to propagate their faith ; Marcion in his turn wanted to have his collection of " witnesses," this time not to establish

<sup>1</sup>*Adv. Marc.*, V, 19. The date of the death of Marcion is not known to us ; it seems that it could not have been later than 160 (Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 25). According to Tertullian (*De præscript*, 30), Marcion wanted to be reconciled with the Church ; he was told that he must bring back with him those he had led astray, and died before he was able to do this.

the agreement between the Law and the Gospel, but to manifest their opposition.

In conformity with this new doctrine, Marcion constituted his Bible. He rejected the Old Testament, and of the New he kept only the Gospel of St Luke, from which again he cut out the first two chapters (the birth and the childhood of Jesus), and the features in the other chapters which did not harmonise with his theology; then come ten Epistles of St Paul, leaving out the Pastoral Epistles and the Epistle to the Hebrews, which Marcion rejects. In the ten which he retains he strikes out anything which seems to him to have a judaising character, which portions he attributes to false Apostles. This new Bible was not drawn up in virtue of effort at criticism, but as a result of a theological thesis; Marcion was a man of action, who regarded the Bible merely as an instrument, and accordingly it had to be manageable and suitable for the work in hand.

Thus armed, Marcion proceeded with the constitution of his dogma and of his Church. He set forth a dualism which divides the whole world into two spheres, the visible world and the invisible world. The visible world was created by the Demiurge, who was its Master, and who believed himself to be its sole Master. This Demiurge does not consciously set himself against the Supreme God, but is ignorant of His existence. This inferior god is not the god of evil, but he is a despot. In this material world which he has created, and which is so unhappy, he has put man, and has infused into him by his breath a soul which comes from his own substance, but this imperfect and weak substance has been mingled with matter, and has been degraded by this contact. Nevertheless, the demiurge has been jealous of this deficient creature, refused him the knowledge of good and evil, and turned him out of the terrestrial paradise.

From thence begins the lamentable history of this fallen race, enslaved to a despotic rule. The Jews, the most evil of all the peoples, became the people of the demiurge who, for their sake, attacked and exterminated rival races; they received from him a law which doubtless

contains some moral precepts, but their morality is narrow and paltry; the rites which he prescribed for them are after the fashion of the creation itself, and display the same defects, foolishness, weakness, and sometimes shamefulness: such is the rite of circumcision. The prophets were merely the envoys of the Demiurge; all of them, and John Baptist, the last of their number, were completely ignorant of God.

But the Sovereign God, the "Stranger God," who owed nothing to this miserable human race, nevertheless desired to save it: "In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar, in the time of Pontius Pilate, Jesus came down from heaven at Capharnaum, a city of Galilee, and taught there in the synagogue": such is the beginning of the Gospel of Marcion.

The Demiurge had, through his prophets, promised the coming of a Messias; he has not yet come. But the good God has sent his Son, who is distinguished from him only in name. Passing through the heaven of the Demiurge, Jesus appeared here below; He was not able to take a material body, for matter is essentially evil, but he took the similitude or appearance of a body; He had no birth, infancy, or baptism, but appeared suddenly in the synagogue of Capharnaum.

Without formally opposing himself to the Demiurge, or proclaiming the distinction between the two Gods, Jesus began to preach, and worked miracles. The disciples of the Demiurge gathered around him, and gave to their god the praise for the miracles of Jesus; Jesus allowed this. Peter recognised him as the Messias of the Demiurge; Jesus imposed silence upon him, to prevent him from spreading abroad a lie. The "proclamation of Christ" consists of the beatitudes, which pronounce beggars to be blessed and curse the rich. Leaving aside all the texts of the Old Testament in which God promises his favour to the poor, Marcion sees in this preaching of Jesus the opposite to the preaching of the Demiurge: those who are now blessed are the pariahs of the old Law.

But in all this preaching, and by all His miracles, Jesus showed Himself to be more powerful than the Demiurge.

Nevertheless, He did not will to seize the latter's domain by force ; he purchased mankind by His death. After His death, He descended into hell to liberate those whom the Demiurge had condemned. Such were "Cain and the Sodomites and the Egyptians and their like, and all the pagans," who have been saved by the Lord when He descended into hell ; but "Abel, Henoch, Noe, and the other just men and the patriarchs and the prophets have not been saved ; for, says Marcion, as they knew their God was constantly tempting them, they thought that he was still tempting them on this occasion ; they did not come before Jesus, did not believe in His message, and have remained in hell."<sup>1</sup>

The Apostles of Christ did not maintain the purity of the Gospel. The Lord raised up St Paul to resume His work, and to carry it on by preaching salvation through faith. But there are only a few, namely, the élite, who remain with St Paul upon these heights. Marcion knows this : "The Demiurge is with the crowd ; the Lord, with the only chosen ones."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Jesus, descending into hell, drew from thence all men in order to save them, with the exception of the just men of the Old Testament ; but upon earth the virtue of His death and the preaching of His Gospel is able to save only a select few : hence through the Incarnation the condition of mankind seems to be worse than it was before. This contradiction shocks one's reason, but the blind prejudice which inspires Marcion and his followers leads them to accept all this. They even take pleasure in this spectacle of the Stranger God descending unexpectedly into this miserable world which knows Him not, and to which He owes nothing ; they also admire this laborious existence of the "companions in misery" who, upheld solely by faith and love, pass through

<sup>1</sup>Irenæus, I, 27, 3. Harnack writes (*Marcion*, p. 169) : "We must pause here, for this is the point which not only appeared to the Fathers of the Church to be the highest point in the malicious blasphemy of Marcion, but it is also the point which shocks us still to-day, and yet it all harmonises with the principles of Marcion." We may grant this, but one remembers the Gospel text dear to Marcion, "A good tree brings forth only good fruit."

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Clement, *Strom.*, III, 10, 69.



this evil world, persecuted by the jealousy of the Demiurge, but faithful to their unknown God. And like the other Gnostics, they take easy consolation from their small number : they are the *élite*.

This sentimental tendency did not provide a very firm basis for theology, which remained hesitating and uncertain : the construction built by Marcion is a hastily-built structure, which its new occupants will have constantly to rebuild, according to new plans. Already in the second century disagreement manifests itself : certain Marcionites remain attached to the teaching of their master, and recognise two divine principles. But at the same period Apelles admits only one principle, while others distinguish three.<sup>1</sup> The Marcionites who thus posit three principles admit, in addition to God the Father of Christ and the God of the Jews, an evil deity who is the god of the pagans. This conception, which became ever more and more general among the Marcionites, manifested the radical dualism which Marcion had endeavoured to avoid, but to which the impulse coming from him led his disciples in spite of him.

Very soon the obscure figure of the Demiurge, the God of the Jews, is lost to view, and we see only the two great rival principles, the good God and the evil one. That will be the great antithesis of Manichæism, and it will relegate to obscurity all the antitheses of Marcion. And yet it was Marcion who prepared the way for this later antithesis.

### MANICHÆISM

Until the early years of the present century, the history of Manichæism and its origins remained obscure. The writings of Mani and of his disciples were indeed very numerous and widespread, but they had been proscribed everywhere, by Catholics, Mahometans, Buddhists, and by Chinese functionaries.

<sup>1</sup>On all these sects see Rhodon, apud Eusebius, *H.E.*, V, 13 ; Adamantius, *De recta in Deum fide*, I, 2 ; Hippolytus, *Philos.*, vii. 31 ; Tertullian, *De resurrectione*, 3.

Of this literature, which seemed to have been destroyed, numerous fragments survived in Chinese Turkestan, where Manichæism had once been very powerful. In the region of Tourfan, the Russians, towards the end of the last century, began researches which were carried on by various missions, German, English, French, and Chinese. These expeditions bore considerable fruit; and all the works published during the last twenty years of Manichæism, and its history, have profited by the discoveries of F. F. W. Müller, Von Le Coq, Stein, and Pelliot.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, while recognising the great progress which these discoveries had led to in the history of Manichæism, all these historians pointed out great lacunæ in the knowledge which they possessed,<sup>2</sup> and expressed their desire for new discoveries: "Perhaps an investigator more fortunate than all his predecessors will find in the ruins of some temple, or in the corners of some unknown library, the complete text of the chief works which were current in Manichæism."<sup>3</sup>

This dream has now been realised. In 1930, some fellahs were digging up the earth near the ruined town of Medinet Madi, in the Fayoum; they found in the ruins of a house a wooden box; as soon as this had been disinterred it fell into pieces, but its contents remained intact. Inside were books written on papyrus, in the Coptic dialect of Assiout; they seem to have been transcribed between 350 and 400, a century after the death of Mani. They contain the works of Mani and of

<sup>1</sup>Among these works, we must mention especially those of Fr. Cumont, P. Alfarc, F. C. Burkitt, G. Bardy, which are mentioned in the bibliography at the end of this essay.

<sup>2</sup>"Unfortunately the fragments consist almost entirely of small and often unintelligible scraps, and they are written either in the Soghdian language, *i.e.*, a sort of Middle Persian intermediate between the Old Persian of the inscriptions and the language used to-day, or else in a proto-Turkish which bears a somewhat similar relation to the speech of Constantinople and Angora. Other documents bearing on the Manichees and coming from the same region are in Chinese." (Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees*, p. 15 sq).

<sup>3</sup>Alfarc, *Les Ecritures manichéennes*, I., p. 137.

his first disciples.<sup>1</sup> These important manuscripts were purchased by C. Schmidt and Chester Beatty, and are at the present time in Berlin and London. We now await their complete publication, which has only just commenced,<sup>2</sup> but in the meantime we have been given some indication of these books in a brief description which C. Schmidt has made after a first examination of them. "The library thus rediscovered contains seven books: two of them are original works by Mani, the five other books are, if we are not entirely mistaken, works of the disciples of the first generation; these are also sources of inestimable value for the history of primitive Manichæism. These new documents constitute a large mass of material: in order to transcribe them at least 2,000 pages have been needed. Consequently, the preparation of the papyrus will require a fair amount of time, about six to eight years. Patience must therefore be exercised until all this collection can be presented to the learned world, translated, and commented on."<sup>3</sup>

We have had to insist somewhat upon this new documentation, and the state in which it is at the present time: the reader will realise that the outline which we give him in this essay has only a provisional character, and that, nevertheless, if it is compared to the books which were written before the discovery of the Fayoum papyrus, it can claim to be based upon a more precise and more assured knowledge of Manichæism.

To begin with, one question discussed for a long time among historians can now be regarded as settled. Manichæism is not, as many have thought, a religion which had its origin in paganism: it is a heresy which developed out of the Christian body, like a parasitical Gnosticism. In his Donnellan Lectures on *The Religion of the Manichees*,

<sup>1</sup>As we have said, these books are in a Coptic translation: they were written originally by Mani in Syriac. One book, which is not found in this collection, the *Shapurakan*, was written by Mani in Persian.

<sup>2</sup>A first fascicule appeared in the summer of 1934, at Stuttgart, published by Kohlhammer.

<sup>3</sup>*Neue Originalquellen des Manichäismus aus Aegypten*, 1933, p. 14.

F. C. Burkitt had the great merit to formulate this thesis clearly, reacting against the tendencies which at that time prevailed. The papyrus of Fayoum has brought a decisive confirmation to this theory. Our first impression is that Mani regards Jesus as one of his precursors, in the same way as Zoroaster and Buddha, and that these three are brethren, and interpreters of the same wisdom, as Mani says in the introduction to one of his books, the *Kephalaia*. At the same time, the very order in which Mani presents these three persons shows the difference in rank which he makes between them : Jesus, Zarades (Zoroaster), Buddha. And this first indication is confirmed by many others, which are more significant : in the psalter kept now in London, we find a whole collection of hymns to Jesus ; in his letters, Mani calls himself, " Mani, Apostle of Jesus Christ " ; and this title is justified thus by Mani in his conversations with his disciples:—

" When the Church of the flesh had been lifted up upon the heights, then was inaugurated my apostolate, concerning which you have questioned me. Since then, the Paraclete has been sent, the Spirit of Truth, who has come to you in this last generation, in conformity with what Jesus said : In the hour when I shall depart, I will send you the Paraclete, and when the Paraclete shall be come, he will teach the world, and will speak to you of justice."

All this reminds one very much of the claims of Montanus : in the year 172, about seventy years before Mani, the prophet of Phrygia had himself based his authority upon the promises of Jesus to his disciples : the Paraclete promised by Jesus has, he asserts, at last come, and it is through Montanus that he speaks.<sup>1</sup> It is, of course, true that Mani has hardly any resemblance with Montanus, there is nothing of the exstastic about him, and as Schmidt says, he had " a clear head and a cool reflection " ; at the same time, his pretensions are the same as those of Montanus : in him it is the Paraclete who speaks, and as Mani says himself, " I have become (with the Paraclete), one single body and one single spirit." But in virtue of this claim, Mani, like Montanus, is closely related to Christianity : the revelation which he brings has itself been foretold by Jesus ; the Paraclete who

<sup>1</sup>Cf. P. de Labriolle, *La Crise Montaniste* (Paris, 1913), p. 131 *sqq.*

speaks through him and who is identified with him is the Spirit promised by Jesus.

Still, while it is true that Mani aimed at absorbing Christianity and surpassing it, he wished at the same time to enrich it with other elements. He writes in his *Kephalaia*, ch. 154 : " The writings, the wisdom, the apocalypses, the parables, the psalms of all the previous religions, gathered from all sources, have come together in my religion, and in the wisdom which I have revealed. As one river mixes with another, and forms one great stream, so also the ancient books have been united to my writings, and there has thus been formed one great wisdom, to which nought can be compared that has been preached to any previous generation. No one has ever written, no one has ever revealed books like to those which I have written."

Thus Mani aimed at enriching Christianity with all that he could gather together from living and popular religions : the religion of Zoroaster, which he found around him in the Persian world, and the religion of Buddha, which he found flourishing in the Indias.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>We read at the commencement of the *Kephalaia* : " At the end of the years of the king Ardaschir, I went forth to preach. I went on a vessel to the country of the Indians. I preached to them the hope of life, and I chose there a good élite. In the year when the king Ardaschir died and his son Shapur became king, I went in a vessel from the land of the Indians to the country of the Persians, and from the land of the Persians I came into the country of Babylon, Maisan, and Chuzistan. I appeared before the king Schapur, and he received me with great honour. He authorised me to travel in his kingdom, and to preach the word of life. I spent several years with him, following him into Persia, the land of the Parthians, and as far as Adiabene, up to the frontiers of the Roman Empire." This text throws light on the life of Mani : his preaching began at the end of the reign of Ardaschir (224-241), therefore about 240. This preaching did not begin all of a sudden on the day of the coronation of Sapor, as An-Nadim later on said (edited by Flügel, *Mani*, p. 84 ; cf. Burkitt, *loc. cit.*, p. 3) ; on that particular day Mani was in India, where he was carrying on his work of evangelisation ; this stay in India was unknown until now. In virtue of this and of many other features, we realise that Mani is much more dependant on the Eastern world than we had hitherto suspected, and that, on the other hand, he is much further removed from the Western world. He followed Sapor in his expeditions, and thus reached Adiabene, the frontiers of the Roman Empire ; but he seems never to have crossed these frontiers.

Mani allowed himself to be captured by that mirage of syncretism which at that time led astray so many minds. It must be remembered that this syncretism, which invaded the whole Roman world, was born in Syria, and that it was from thence that it was transported to Rome by the Severi. We are therefore hardly surprised at Mani's endeavours : impatient to win the whole world to his religion, he made it his object to harness all the religious forces which he found living around him, and without doubt this flexibility of adaptation facilitated his first foundations. But this advantage was dearly bought : Manichæism took upon itself a whole mythology, the weight and shame of which it had to support.<sup>1</sup>

By reason of this feature, Manichæism was linked up to the Gnostic systems which preceded it : its mythological cosmology recalls those of Basilides and Valentine. But of all the Gnostics, the one whom Mani followed most closely was, without any question, Marcion : neither the one nor the other had the making of a metaphysician, nor even of a visionary ; but both were conquerors and organisers, and indefatigable founders of churches. They wanted to found churches everywhere, Marcion throughout the Roman Empire, Mani, still more ambitious, in the entire world ; they linked up the separate churches closely with each other, and in this respect again Mani perfected the work of his predecessor ; he took in hand the government of all his communities ; to assist him he chose a group of disciples which recalls the college of the Apostles ; among them he chose a successor to himself, Sisinnios. In 272 Mani was put to death by king Bahram ; Sisinnios assured the continuity and the unity of the sect ; he was killed in his turn, but Manichæism survived him.

Thanks to its strong organisation, Manichæism did not,

<sup>1</sup>It suffices to recall here, as an example, the myth of " the seduction of the archontes," studied by F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le Manichéisme*, I, p. 54-68. Cumont recalls, *ib.*, p. 53, that " it was above all these interminable fables concerning the heaven, the stars, the sun, and the moon, these innumerable stories concerning the fabrication of the world, full of foolish sacrileges, which deterred St Augustine from the sect into which he had strayed." Cf., *August., Conf.*, V, 7, 1 ; V, 3, 6 ; *Contra Faust.*, xx. 9.

like the heresy of Valentine and that of Marcion, split up soon after its birth into rival sects. Sent forth through the world with a powerful impulse, it absorbed Marcionism, first in the West and then in the East. It retained its dualism, and accentuated it, opposing the good principle to the evil principle, light to darkness ; it also maintained its ideal of the austere life, and, by the distinction between the elect and the hearers, it rendered its asceticism more rigorous. Its metaphysic was indeed very weak, and in more than one feature it offended both reason and the moral sense, and nevertheless its ambitious pretensions and its strong cohesion gave it a powerful and constant attraction over the masses. This Gnosticism, the last form of all, was to be the most successful and the most lasting ; though persecuted everywhere, it was to make its way through the old world during ten centuries, and in the thirteenth century it was still to menace Christianity in Italy and in France. To arrest its progress a Crusade would be required, and above all the efforts of St Dominic, St Peter Martyr, and of St Thomas.

We have not to study its history up to this late date, but in bringing this rapid survey to a conclusion we must insist upon the gravity of the Gnostic danger, and upon the benefit resulting from the Catholic reaction.

The study of the great theologians of Gnosticism, Basilides, Valentine, Marcion, Mani, has brought out sufficiently clearly the perilous nature of these speculations which, by attacking Christian dogma, dissolved it. The Old Testament was nothing more than an allegory or, according to Marcion, the history of the reign of a tyrant, the Demiurge, served by his angels and his prophets. In this way the continuity of the Divine plan from the Creation until Christ is obscured ; Christianity is severed from history, and is dissolved like a dream. Christ himself is bereft by Docetism of His real humanity, and by the theory of Eons of His divinity : a diminished deity, and an apparent man, He is nothing more than a mythological figure, whose whole rôle is reduced to the manifestation of the superior world ; his redemption on the Cross is effaced, and salvation is no longer the sharing in the divine life by incorporation

into Christ ; it is the communication, made to a few initiates, of secrets concerning the divine emanations, and the creation of the world ; ambitious revelations, which at first flatter pride, but which are destined very soon to lose themselves in the transmission of formulæ and of magic names.

From all this the Church saved Christians by fighting against Gnosticism ; it guarded their faith in the one God of the prophets and of the Gospel ; it delivered them from these foolish and often unclean fancies, which dissipated the Deity into the thirty Eons of the Pleroma ; it maintained in its intransigent purity the revelation which the Heavenly Father has granted, through His only Son, not merely to a few privileged persons, but to all mankind ; all are created by God, all are redeemed by the blood of Christ, all are called into the unity of His Body. They are not divided by indelible differences of race as into the spirituals and the carnal men of Gnosticism, but all are one in Christ Jesus. Mankind has been healed of that pride of caste by which he had separated himself from his brethren and from God, and once more there has shone before his eyes the ideal aim which the Son of God set before us in His prayer to His Father, and to which He leads us on : " That they may be one, as we are One."



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## MARCIONISM

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## MANICHÆISM

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